

thinking / about dongles



<http://www.flickr.com/photos/straup/8206119393/>

We launched the alpha version of the new [collections website](http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/) at the end of September. Then I spent a good chunk of the next two months, on the road, talking about it. Or talking around it, sometimes.

There's the nerdy nerd version with walks through some of the technical architecture and statements of bias for those choices. This was one half of a talk that I did with Micah at the [Museum and Computers Network conference](http://www.mcn.edu/mcn-2012-annual-conference) (MCN) in November.

- Parallel-TMS [part one](http://www.micahwalter.com/node/4) and [part two](http://www.aaronland.info/weblog/2012/11/09/jello/#parallel-tms)

It's nerdy but just as importantly it discusses the reasons why we chose to do things the way we have. Namely that: *The speed with which the code running an application can be re-arranged*

in order to adapt to circumstances. This is not the only way of doing things. Other museums may have legitimate reasons for a slower more deliberate pace but given that we are in the middle of a ground-up renovation and re-imagining of the museum and given the nature of the squishy world of design we don't.

The other talks bracket the one we did at MCN. There is a long talk and a very very long talk. They are the "think-y" talks. Both were funhouse-mirror keynotes delivered first at [Access 2012](http://accessconference.ca/about/past-conferences/) <http://accessconference.ca/about/past-conferences/>, a libraries and technologies conference, in Montreal and then a month later at the [New Zealand National Digital Forum](http://www.ndf.org.nz/) (NDF) in Wellington.

Both talks are, ultimately, very much about the work we're doing at the Cooper-Hewitt and the core of each keynote covers the same shifting ground that define our daily grind. Neither talk is a timeline of events or a 12-step songline for re-inventing your museum or the mother of all product demos. Those have their place but I don't think that a keynote is one of them.

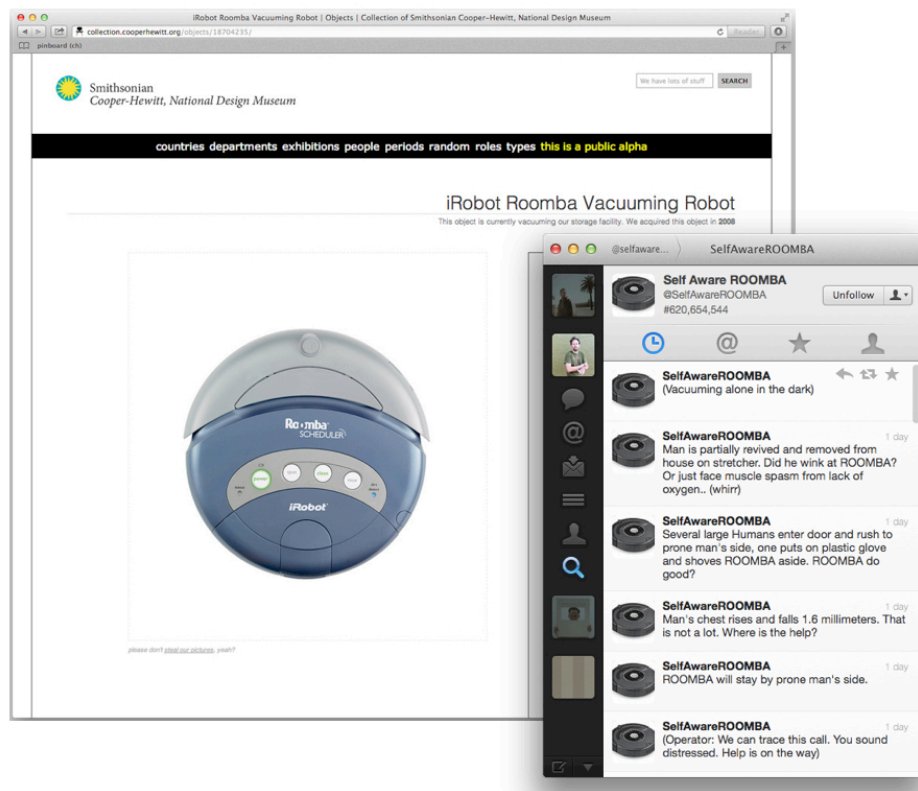
I chose instead to ask the question of why we bother collecting any of the stuff we keep hidden away in our storage facilities in the first place and to work through the claim that the distinction between museums and archives, and by extension libraries, is collapsing in most people's minds. Assuming it ever existed in the first place.

- [We Were Otaku Before It Was Cool](http://www.aaronland.info/weblog/2012/10/23/callback/#otaku) <http://www.aaronland.info/weblog/2012/10/23/callback/#otaku>
- [time pixels](http://www.aaronland.info/weblog/2012/12/01/coffee-and-wifi/#timepixels) <http://www.aaronland.info/weblog/2012/12/01/coffee-and-wifi/#timepixels>

In between (or rather before) all this talking was even more talking. In October I attended [To Be Designed](http://tobedesigned.nearfuturelaboratory.com/) (TBD), a three-day [design fiction](http://nearfuturelaboratory.com/2009/03/17/design-fiction-a-short-essay-on-design-science-fact-and-fiction/) workshop held in Detroit. The goal of TBD was to produce, from scratch, a near-future product catalog and in the process the experience worked its way in to every other talk I did in 2012.

I also spoke with [James Bridle](http://shorttermmemoryloss.com/) and [Joanne McNeil](http://joannemcneil.com/) as part of Rhizome's [Stories from the New Aesthetic](http://www.newmuseum.org/calendar/view/stories-from-the-new-aesthetic), at the New Museum. [My talk](http://www.aaronland.info/weblog/2012/10/08/signs/#stories) doesn't actually hold hands with any of the other "museum" talks but does sort of wink at them from across a crowded subway car. It was also the first time this slide, which has shown up in

every subsequent talk, appeared.



Because this is what 2012 looks like for museums.

It is most definitely not about Twitter but about the fact that some random person out there on the Internet is building a record of understanding about Roombas that may well rival anything we will ever do ourselves.

Beyond that, we are being forced to accept the fact that our collections are becoming "alive". Or at least they are assuming the plausible illusion of being alive.

We are having to deal with the fact that someone else might be breathing life in to our collections for us or, frankly, despite us. We are having to deal with the fact that it might not even be a person doing it. <http://content.stamen.com/superball.html>

These earlier talks were the soundtrack music. They were soundtrack music in a busy room

with lots of people talking. The reason I mention them here is because the place where I think they overlap with the three “museum” talks is at the intersection of motive and how we understand its consequences and how we measure it in a world where the means of production are no longer much of a proxy for anything.

Motive and desire. Desire and means.

The good news is that this is okay. This is better than okay. This presents an opportunity that we’ve never had before and we have proven, by the work that precedes us, that we are not complete morons so I believe we can make something of this.

The bad news is that we are competing with Tumblr. Not Tumblr the company but the ability to, more easily than ever before, collect and catalog and investigate a subject and to share — to publish and to distribute — that knowledge among a community of peers.

Which sounds an awful lot like classical scholarship to my ears. Even if the subject happens to be exercise treadmills. Or tyre swans. <http://tyreswans.blogspot.com/>

Call me naive but I thought that we had decided that what was important was measuring people on the rigour and merit of their study and not so much on the subject themselves. We’ve been bitten by those blinders so many times already that maybe we could just get past them this time?

Because people are going to do this. They are going to build catalogs and registries and pointers to the things in their life and they are going to put them online so that they have... a center of mass around which the rest of their lives can orbit.

But most important of all is that people are going to do this because they have the means at their disposal. We no longer operate in a world where we have any kind of special access to the means of production and no one is ever going to go back to that world, at least not willingly.

Ask yourselves this: [Why didn’t David Walsh give his collection to one of our museums?](#)

<http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2012/minutiae-future-now/> I am less concerned with the answer than with the question, in this case. MONA is the far end of the spectrum when we talk about what’s

possible. David Walsh has, I'm told, more money than the sky but squint your eyes a bit and you see not money but means and desire.

Now look back at the internet.

So, what's happened between then and now? Aside from just getting back to thinking about and sweating the details as we look towards 2014 the Labs team had a meeting, with a visiting museum nerd, a couple weeks ago.

We were sitting in one of the bigger conference rooms so there was a projector resting in the middle of the table surrounded by a small inanimate support staff of VGA dongles. At one point Seb picked up one of the dongles and asked: *How do we (the Cooper-Hewitt) show something like this?*

It seems like a throwaway question and in some ways it is. The simultaneous peril and opportunity of a design museum is that our mandate is to consider the entire universe of objects like this. Think of everything you've ever known about formal design and aesthetics multiplied by automated manufacturing and distributed openly available databases of designs (and gotchas) and then multiplied again by the steady, plodding march of technology.

And there's the rub: The VGA dongle is made even more fascinating in that light. All VGA dongles are the same at one end. The end with the VGA adapter. The end with the weight of a black hole that the computer industry despite all their best efforts, and advances, can't seem to escape.

In fairness we *might* just barely be starting to see a world beyond VGA in that fewer and fewer devices are using it as their default input standard but I suspect it will still be another five (probably ten) years before it will be unnecessary to ask whether there's a VGA-to-whatever adapter.

And that's the other end of the adapter. That whole other world of trying to improve or re-imagine video display. That whole other world of computers and other equally real and conceptual "devices", at the end of those adapters, that we can use a way to understand the shadows of our history.



That would be an awesome show, wouldn't it?

And if someone wanted to they could just set up a Tumblr (or whatever) account and grab all the press shots for each dongle from Amazon. There's probably even a decent opportunity for corporate sponsorship in the form of affiliate/referral links or simply Google Ad Words ads.

A comprehensive cataloging of images of VGA dongles does not an archive, or an expert or a scholar, make but it is a pretty important piece of the puzzle. And what happens when that random person with a Tumblr account writes — and posts — the most comprehensive history of VGA dongles the world has ever seen? Everyone remembers [the epic 9, 000 word Quora post on airplane cockpits](http://www.quora.com/Airplanes/What-do-all-the-controls-in-an-airplane-cockpit-do) <http://www.quora.com/Airplanes/What-do-all-the-controls-in-an-airplane-cockpit-do>, right?

I mentioned all this to [Joanne](http://www.joannemcneil.com/) <http://www.joannemcneil.com/> one evening and she pointed out that you could probably do the entire show for free if you just ordered all the dongles from Amazon and sent them back before the return policy expired. It's a genius idea.

You probably wouldn't be able to remove the dongles from those overwrought and horrible

plastic moulds that all electronics are packaged in but that might also be more interesting than not.

[Piotr Adamczyk](https://sites.google.com/site/pdadamczyk/) <https://sites.google.com/site/pdadamczyk/> was one of the other keynote speakers at NDF this year and he spoke about the work he's doing with the Google Art Project (GAP). He pointed out that GAP is really more like a [Rachel Whiteread](http://www.flickr.com/search/?w=all&q=%22rachel+whiteread%22&m=text) <http://www.flickr.com/search/?w=all&q=%22rachel+whiteread%22&m=text>

sculpture than anything else; that GAP can show you the shape of the *inside* of a museum. It's a lovely way to think about what they're doing whatever else you think about the project.



<http://www.flickr.com/photos/straup/8201166170/>

To likewise belabour injection-moulded packaging would be a mostly silly way to articulate and conceptualize how we might display a circus show of VGA dongles. But only a little. Given how difficult is it to remove anything from moulded packaging (without also destroying the packaging itself) putting the whole thing on a pedestal un-opened might be the only way we have to consider the formal qualities of the shells that house all the electronic barnacles that cover our lives.

So, yeah. Welcome to 2013.

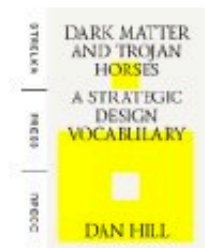
This entry was posted in CH 3.0 <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/ch-3-0/> *on January 3, 2013* [<http://labs.->

cooperhewitt.org/2013/thinking-dongles/] *by asc* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/asc/> .

Thumbnails First & General Visual Bending

Our Museum has a new digital-only book series coming out called DesignFile.

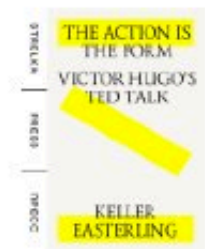
I designed the covers, and we want to show here how much thought we put into them, because it's more than first meets the eye. Designing anything for a design museum is always very meta-meta-meta.



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[http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Screen-Shot-2012-11-02-at-](http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Screen-Shot-2012-11-02-at-7.47.44-PM.png)

[7.47.44-PM.png](http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Screen-Shot-2012-11-02-at-7.47.44-PM.png)

Design we liked: [Strelka Press](http://www.strelka.com/books/?lang=en) <http://www.strelka.com/books/?lang=en>

There is a sort of prerequisite reading for this—[Craig Mod's essay](http://craigmod.com/journal/hack_the_cover/) [http://craigmod.com/journal/hack_the_-cover/](http://craigmod.com/journal/hack_the_cover/) called Hack the Cover. The essay introduces ways to re-think what book covers can and should do in digital format. (What if the cover had a little dashboard area for updates and related information? What if the cover imagery somehow dispersed itself throughout the body of the text? What if we designed separate graphics for pre and post-purchase?) We kept this essay in mind and shared it with everyone involved in the process as an intro to our mindset.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Screen-Shot-2012-11-02-at-7.50.19->

PM.png

Design we liked: [Sternberg Press](http://www.sternberg-press.com/?pageId=3) <http://www.sternberg-press.com/?pageId=3>

The essay also has basic tips on what works visually (large icons, large typography, boldness) when you shrink the cover down and look at it in its true natural habitats: Amazon, publishing websites, iBook shelf, Kindle library, etc.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengi.ne.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/iBooks-Stars.jpg>

How it looks on the iBook shelf should not be an afterthought.

DesignFile is cool because the books can be about ANYthing design-related (similar to our exhibitions and programs, which range from cutting edge interaction design to 16th century glassware). I love to find the connections among these diverse examples of design (i.e., the eternal human pursuit of creating and improving *stuff*) across times, nations, ideologies and peoples.

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 Design Books 2010: A list
 by Andrew Otwell
 "heyotwell"

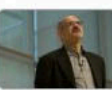


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★★★★★ (8)

<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/amazon-labs.jpg>

This is a lofty way to say that the DesignFile visual system had to be flexible: comfortably covering all sorts of content, whether historical, contemporary, popular, obscure, nerdy, or fancy.

They also had to be flexible technically– function on Kindle, iPad, iPhone, as a thumbnail on Amazon, etc.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/kindlelibrary-lumpy.jpg>

How does it look in the Kindle library? We were inspired by how [this Oliver Sacks series](http://craig-mod.com/images/journal/coccyx/webb-sacks-thumb.jpg) [about Neuroscience created a giant image of a human head](http://craig-mod.com/images/journal/coccyx/webb-sacks-thumb.jpg) when ordered alphabetically in the Kindle library.

How to be graphically flexible and technologically all-encompassing without being a total visual snooze? And also somehow communicate that the single and beautiful unifying thread across all the different books is something as broad and [polysemic](http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/polysemic) as *design*?

Iteration was the key for us. Once we agreed on the above requirements, we played with a lot of different ideas.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Devices-Stain.jpg>

A design we liked but decided against because it didn't translate to greyscale.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/devices-plain.jpg>

Super plain! Inspired by [Architecture Words](http://www.aaschool.ac.uk/PUBLIC/AAPUBLICATIONS/New.php?item=541) <http://www.aaschool.ac.uk/PUBLIC/AAPUBLICATIONS/New.php?item=541>, a print book series we saw at the [Designers & Books fair](http://bookfair.designersandbooks.com/) <http://bookfair.designersandbooks.com/> and liked.

We also agreed to fight logo creep. The only logo on the cover would be the DesignFile logo. A collaborative publishing project like this had the potential for a cover swamped with fussy, tiny logos.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/devices-anemic.jpg>

This design is still my favorite even though we didn't choose it.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Devices-Fancy.jpg>

This very simple and elegant version was inspired by a German publisher,

***Reclam** <http://www.reclam.de/>, whose schoolbooks and textbooks I really like.*



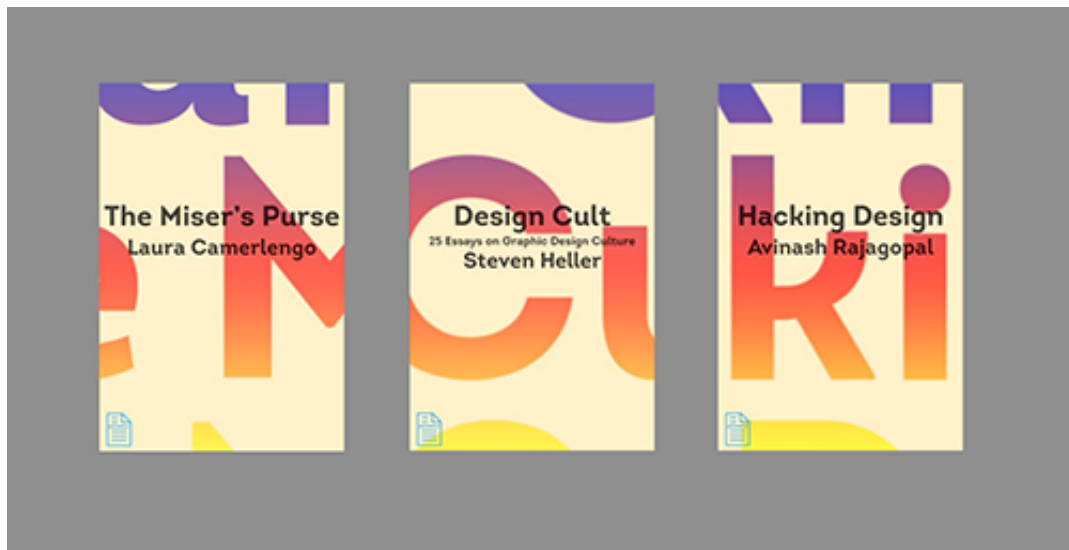
<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Devices-Planes.jpg>

We almost went with this as final, but when Pam came in as head of Cross-Platform Publishing, she thought it didn't grab enough attention. At first I didn't want to re-open the design process (oy!) but in retrospect I'm glad we did, I like the new ones better. And graphic design is pretty much always fun to do.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/devices-madmen.jpg>

This one was well-liked, but still not the one.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/DesignFile-Covers.png>

Another idea that came very close...

You'll have to peep the books on [Amazon](http://www.amazon.com/Design-Cult-ebook/dp/B00ATLA0PK) <http://www.amazon.com/Design-Cult-ebook/dp/B00ATLA0PK> to see what the final design looks like.

I would love to hear your comments & thoughts on these ideas and iterations.

This entry was posted in CH 3.0 <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/ch-3-0/> *on January 9, 2013* [<http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/function-ebook-cover-tale-iterations/>] *by katieshelly* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/katieshelly/>.

Who's on first?



<http://www.flickr.com/photos/travelinglibrarian/8353513343/>

photo by Martin Kalfatovic

We made a new thing. It is a nascent thing. It is an experimental thing. It is a thing we hope other people will help us “kick the tires” around.

It's called “Who's on first?” or, more accurately, “[solr-whosonfirst](https://github.com/cooperhewitt/solr-whosonfirst)”. [solr-whosonfirst](https://github.com/cooperhewitt/solr-whosonfirst) is an experimental [Solr 4](http://lucene.apache.org/solr/) core for mapping person names between institutions using a number of tokenizers and analyzers.

How does it work?

The core contains the minimum viable set of data fields for doing concordances between people from a variety of institutions: `collection`; `collection_id`; `name` and when available `year_birth`; `year_death`.

The value of `name` is then meant to be copied (literally, using Solr `copyField` definitions) to a variety of specialized field definitions. For example the `name` field is copied to a `name_phonetic` so that you can query the entire corpus for names that sound alike.

Right now there are only two such fields, both of which are part of the default Solr schema: `name_general` and `name_phonetic`.

The idea is to compile a broad collection of specialized fields to offer a variety of ways to compare data sets. The point is not to presume that any one tokenizer / analyzer will be able to meet everyone's needs but to provide a common playground in which we might try things out and share tricks and lessons learned.

Frankly, just comparing the people in our collections using Solr's built-in spellchecker might work as well as anything else.

For example:

```
$> curl 'http://localhost:8983/solr/select?q=name_general:mog-  
gridge&wt=json&indent=on&fq=name_general:bill'  
  
{  
  "response": {  
    "numFound": 2, "start": 0, "docs": [  
      {  
        "collection_id": "18062553" ,  
        "concordances": [  
          "wikipedia:id= 1600591",  
          "freebase:id=/m/05fpg1"],  
        "uri": "x-urn:ch:id=18062553" ,
```

```

    "collection": "cooperhewitt" ,
    "name": ["Bill Moggridge"],
    "_version_": 1423275305600024577},
  {
    "collection_id": "OL3253093A" ,
    "uri": "x-urn:ol:id=OL3253093A" ,
    "collection": "openlibrary" ,
    "name": ["Bill Moggridge"],
    "_version_": 1423278698929324032}]
}

```

Now, we've established a concordance between [our record for Bill Moggridge](https://collection-cooperhewitt.org/people/18062553/) and [Bill's author page at the Open Library](http://openlibrary.org/authors/OL3253093A/Bill_Moggridge). Yay!

Here's another example:

```

$> http://localhost:8983/solr/whosonfirst/select?q=name_general:drey-
fuss&wt=json&indent=on

{"response":{"numFound":3,"start":0,"docs":[
  {
    "concordances":["ulan:id=500059346"],
    "name":["Dreyfuss, Henry"],
    "uri":"x-urn:imamuseum:id=656174",
    "collection":"imamuseum",
    "collection_id":"656174",
    "year_death":[1972],
    "year_birth":[1904],
    "_version_":1423872453083398149},
  {

```

```

    "concordances":["ulan:id=500059346",
      "wikipedia:id=1697559",
      "freebase:id=/m/05p6rp",
      "viaf:id=8198939",
      "ima:id=656174"],
    "name":["Henry Dreyfuss"],
    "uri":"x-urn:ch:id=18041501",
    "collection":"cooperhewitt",
    "collection_id":"18041501",
    "_version_":1423872563648397315},
  {
    "concordances":["wikipedia:id=1697559",
      "moma:id=1619"],
    "name":["Henry Dreyfuss Associates"],
    "uri":"x-urn:ch:id=18041029",
    "collection":"cooperhewitt",
    "collection_id":"18041029",
    "_version_":1423872563567656970}]
}

```

See the way the two records for Henry Dreyfuss, from the Cooper-Hewitt, have the same concordance in Wikipedia? That's an interesting wrinkle that we should probably take a look at. In the meantime, we've managed to glean some new information from the [IMA](http://www.imamu-seum.org/) <http://www.imamu-seum.org/> (Henry Dreyfuss' year of birth and death) and them from us (concordances with Wikipedia and Freebase and VIAF).

The goal is to *start* building out the some of the smarts around entity (that's fancy-talk for people and things) disambiguation that we tend to gloss over.

None of what's being proposed here is all that sophisticated or clever. It's a little clever and my hunch tells me it will be a good general-purpose spelunking tool and something for sanity checking data more than it will be an all-knowing magic pony. *The important part, for me, is that it's an effort to stand something up in public and to share it and to invite comments and sug-*

gestions and improvements and gentle cluebats.

Concordances (and machine tags)

There are also some even-more experimental and very much optional hooks for allowing you to store known concordances as machine tags and to query them using [the same wildcard syntax that Flickr uses](http://www.flickr.com/groups/api/discuss/72157594497877875/) <http://www.flickr.com/groups/api/discuss/72157594497877875/> , as well as generating [hierarchical facets](https://wiki.apache.org/solr/HierarchicalFaceting) <https://wiki.apache.org/solr/HierarchicalFaceting> .

I put the [machine tags reading list](https://github.com/straup/machinetags-readinglist) <https://github.com/straup/machinetags-readinglist> that I prepared for Museums and the Web in 2010, on Github. It's a good place to start if you're unfamiliar with the subject.

Download

There are two separate repositories that you can download to get started. They are:

- [solr-whosonfirst](https://github.com/cooperhewitt/solr-whosonfirst) <https://github.com/cooperhewitt/solr-whosonfirst>
- [solr-whosonfirst-data](https://github.com/cooperhewitt/solr-whosonfirst-data) <https://github.com/cooperhewitt/solr-whosonfirst-data>

The first is the actual Solr core and config files. The second is a set of sample data files and import scripts that you can use to pre-seed your instance of Solr. Sample data files are available from the following sources:

- [Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum](https://github.com/cooperhewitt/collection) <https://github.com/cooperhewitt/collection>
- [Indianapolis Museum of Art](https://github.com/IMAmuseum/ima-collection) <https://github.com/IMAmuseum/ima-collection>
- [The Open Library](http://openlibrary.org/developers/dumps) <http://openlibrary.org/developers/dumps> (specifically their list of authors)
- The Walker Art Center

The data in these files is *not* standardized. There are source specific tools for importing each dataset in the bin directory. In some cases the data here is a subset of the data that the

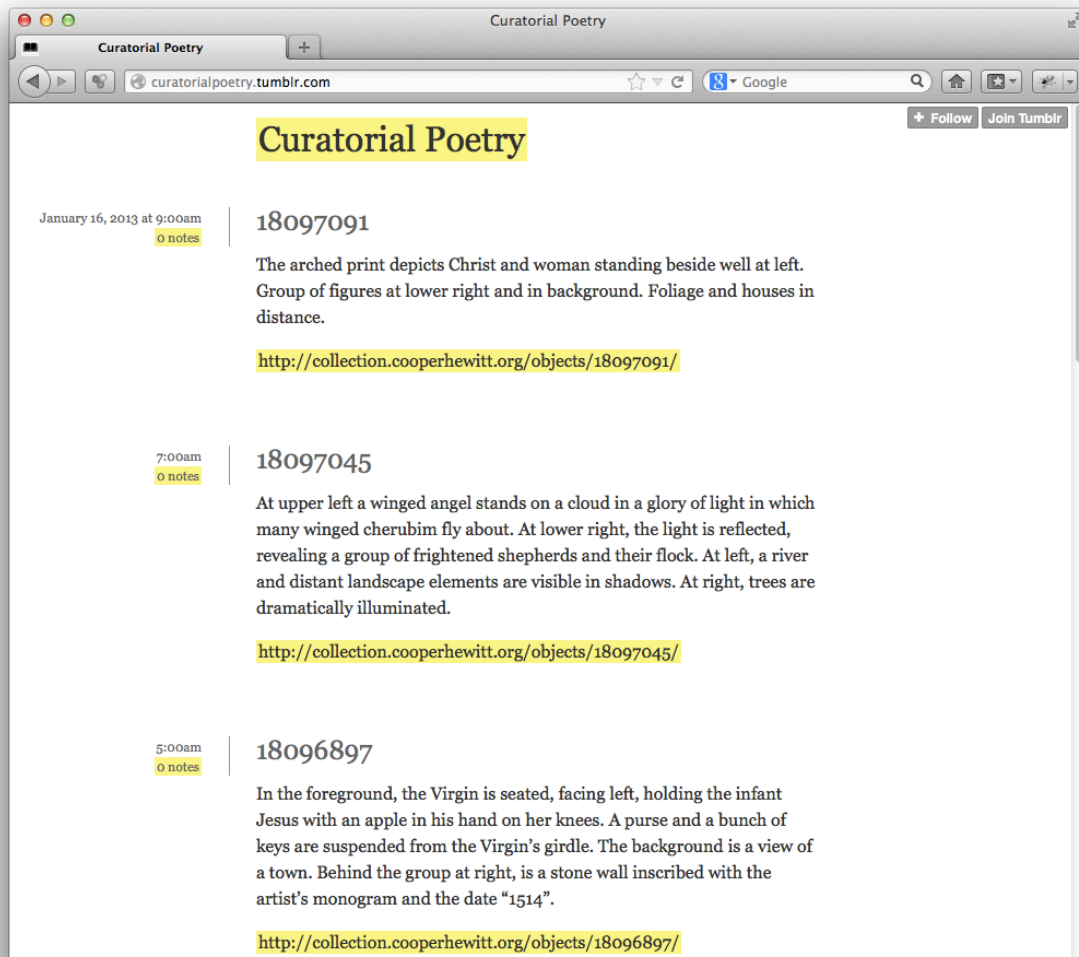
source itself publishes. For example, the Open Library dataset only contains authors and IDs since there are so many of them (approximately 7M).

Additional datasets will be added as time and circumstances (and pull requests) permit.

Enjoy!

This entry was posted in CH 3.0 <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/ch-3-0/> *and tagged alpha* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/tag/alpha/> *on January 14, 2013* [<http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/first/>] *by asc* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/asc/>.

Curatorial Poetry



I made a fun thing...yesterday. In my 20% time, downtime, er.. 2am time, I decided to build a simple tumblr blog called [Curatorial Poetry](http://curatorialpoetry.tumblr.com) <http://curatorialpoetry.tumblr.com>. I was inspired by Aaron's take on our collection data and how he chose to present objects in our collection that have no image, but have a "description." In the office we often have fun reading these aloud, or better, with [Apple's screen reader](http://www.apple.com/accessibility/macosx/vision.html) <http://www.apple.com/accessibility/macosx/vision.html>.

But, I thought it would be fun to "reblog" these in another form. So, I built a [simple python script](https://gist.github.com/4547769) <https://gist.github.com/4547769> to do just that. To do this, I forked our collection data and [wrote a short tool](https://github.com/micahwalter/collection/blob/master/bin/generate-sqlite-objects.py) <https://github.com/micahwalter/collection/blob/master/bin/generate-sqlite-objects.py> to convert our JSON

objects into an sqlite3 database. I chose sqlite3 because, well, it's light, and doesn't require me to set up a DB server or anything.

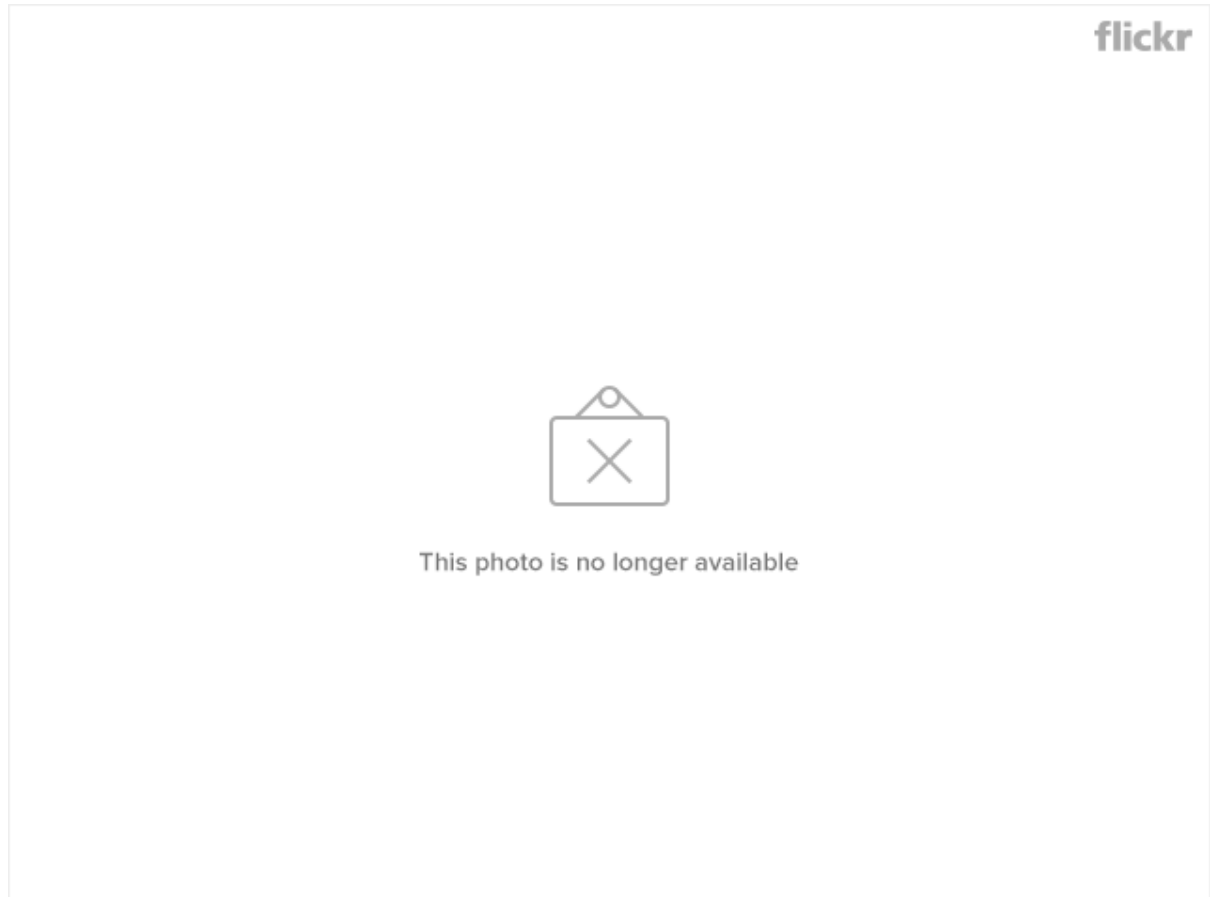
Next, I spent most of my time trying to learn how OAuth2 works. It took me a good bit of time googling around before I realized that the [python-oauth2](https://github.com/simplegeo/python-oauth2) library includes OAuth1 (which tumblr uses). All I really needed to do with the tumblr API was to create the post. Once I had my keys worked out and authenticating, it was just one line of code.

Once the post is published, the script updates my sqlite3 db so it makes sure to not post the same thing twice. Thats all!

I'd like to expand the code for this a bit to add some error checking, build in connections to our own API (instead of using the data dump) and connect with Twitter. I'm also interested in adding other museum's data. We have the [IMA data available on GitHub](https://github.com/IMA-museum/ima-collection), but they don't include "description" text, so well see... In the meantime, follow it and you'll receive a new "poem" in your tumblr feed every two hours, for the next 8 years!

This entry was posted in CH 3.0 <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/ch-3-0/> *on January 16, 2013* [<http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/curatorial-poetry/>] *by micah* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/micah/>.

Albers boxes



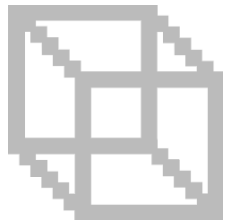
We have a lot of objects in [our collection](http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/) <http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/>. Unfortunately we are also [lacking images for many of those same objects](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/curatorial-poetry/) <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/curatorial-poetry/>. There are a variety of reasons why we might not have an image for something in our collection.

- It may not have been digitized yet (aka had its picture taken).
- We may not have secured the reproduction rights to publish an image for an object.
- Sometimes, we think we have an image for an object but it's managed to get lost in the shuffle. That's not awesome but it does happen.

What all of those examples point to though is the need for a way to convey the reason why an image can't be displayed. Traditionally museum websites have done this using a single stock (and frankly, boring) `image-not-available` placeholder.

We recently — finally — updated the site to display list style results with images, by default. Yay!

In the process of doing that we also added two *different* icons for images that have gone missing and images that we don't have, either because an object hasn't been digitized or we don't have the reproduction rights which is kind of like not being digitized. This is what they look like:



The not digitized icon is courtesy [Shelby Blair \(The Noun Project\)](http://thenounproject.com/noun/question/#icon-No5202) <http://thenounproject.com/noun/question/#icon-No5202>.

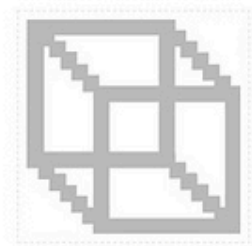
The missing image icon is courtesy [Henrik LM \(The Noun Project\)](http://thenounproject.com/noun/question/#icon-No8325) <http://thenounproject.com/noun/question/#icon-No8325>.

So that's a start but it still means that we can end up with pages of results that look like this:

[countries](#) [departments](#) [exhibitions](#) [media](#) [people](#) [periods](#) [random](#) [roles](#) [types](#) [this is a public alpha](#)

Postmodern

There are 13 objects for this period / [View results as a list](#)



This object hasn't been digitized yet.

[Drawing, "Design for Furniture in Robot Form with Two Details", 1980s](#) / This object's accession number is 1997-19-344 and is dated 1980s / This is from the [Drawings, Prints, and Graphic Design](#) department



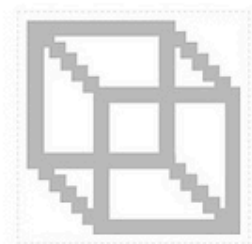
This object hasn't been digitized yet.

[Drawing, "Design for Furniture and Details", 1980s](#) / This object's accession number is 1997-19-343 and is dated 1980s / This is from the [Drawings, Prints, and Graphic Design](#) department

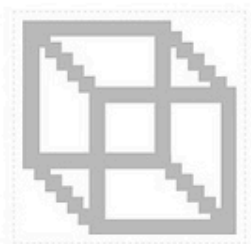


This object hasn't been digitized yet.

[Design, "Design for Furniture in Robot Form", 1980s](#) / This object's accession number is 1997-19-342 and is dated 1980s / This is from the [Drawings, Prints, and Graphic Design](#) department



This object hasn't been digitized yet.



This object hasn't been digitized yet.



This object hasn't been digitized yet.

What to do?

We have begun thinking of the problem as one of needing to develop a visual language (languages?) that a person can become familiar with, over time, and use a way to quickly scan a result set and gain some understanding in the absence of an image of the object itself.

Today, we let some of those ideas loose on the website (in a controlled and experimental way). They're called Albers boxes. Albers boxes are a shout-out and a whole lot of warm and sloppy kisses for the artist [Josef Albers](http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/people/18052071/) and his book about the [Interaction of Color](http://openlibrary.org/works/OL2286177W/Interaction_of_color).

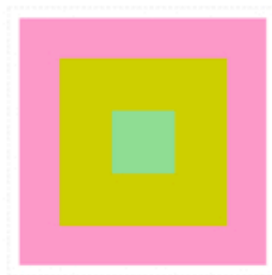
This is what they look like:



This object hasn't had its picture taken yet.

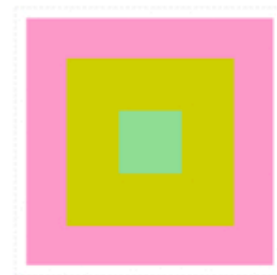
■ [Product Design and Decorative Arts](#)
■ Unspecified Period
■ [Pitcher Prototype](#)

[Pitcher Prototype, 2010-12-20, ca. 1986](#) / This object's accession number is 2010-12-20 and is dated ca. 1986 / This is from the [Product Design and Decorative Arts](#) department



This object hasn't had its picture taken yet.

[Shape Study, 2010-12-19, 1986](#) / This object's accession number is 2010-12-19 and is dated 1986 / This is from the [Product Design and Decorative Arts](#) department



This object hasn't had its picture taken yet.

[Shape Study, 2010-12-18, 1986](#) / This object's accession number is 2010-12-18 and is dated 1986 / This is from the [Product Design and Decorative Arts](#) department



[Chair, "Cabbage", 2008](#) / This object's accession number is 2009-9-1 and is dated 2008 / This is from the [Product Design and Decorative Arts](#) department



[Chair, "Solid C2", Design 2004, Produced 2009](#) / This object's accession number is 2009-8-1 and is dated Design 2004, Produced 2009 / This is from the [Product Design and Decorative Arts](#) department



[Telephone, "Model 500", 1953](#) / This object's accession number is 2009-50-1-a/c and is dated 1953 / This is from the [Product Design and Decorative Arts](#) department / We have [3 images](#) of this object

The outer ring of an Albers box represents the department that an object belongs to. The middle ring represents the period that an object is part of. The inner ring denotes the type of object. When you mouse over an Albers box we display a legend for each one of the colors.

We expect that the Albers boxes will be a bit confusing to people at first but we also think that their value will quickly become apparent. Consider the following example. The Albers boxes allow us to look at this set of objects and understand that there are two different departments, two periods and three types of objects.

Or at least that there are different sorts of things which is harder to do when the alternative is a waterfall of museum-issued blank-faced placeholder images.

Things we acquired in 1977

We acquired 592 objects that year and this is page 4 of 40



Book, 1977-84.1 / this object's accession number is 1977-84-1 / this is from the [Drawings, Prints, and Graphic Design](#) department



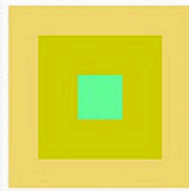
Carpel, 1977-82.2 / this object's accession number is 1977-82-2 / this is from the [Textiles](#) department



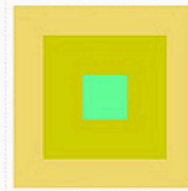
Carpel, 1977-82.1 / this object's accession number is 1977-82-1 / this is from the [Textiles](#) department



Couture Embroidery Sample, 1977-81-9, 1930-39 / this object's accession number is 1977-81-9 and is dated 1930-39 / this is from the [Textiles](#) department



Couture Embroidery Sample, 1977-81-8, 1930-39 / this object's accession number is 1977-81-8 and is dated 1930-39 / this is from the [Textiles](#) department



Couture Embroidery Sample, 1977-81-7, 1930-39 / this object's accession number is 1977-81-7 and is dated 1930-39 / this is from the [Textiles](#) department

The Albers boxes are not enabled by default. You'll need to head over to [the new experimental section](#) <http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/experimental/#a> of the collections website and tell us that you'd like to see them. Experimental features are, well, experimental so they might go away or change without much notice but we hope this is just the first of many.

Enjoy!

Also: If you're wondering how the colors are chosen take a look at [this lovely blog post from 2007](#) <http://blog.dopplr.com/2007/10/23/in-rainbows/> from the equally lovely kids at Dopplr. They had the right idea way back then so we're just doing what they did!

This entry was posted in CH 3.0 <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/ch-3-0/> *and tagged alpha* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/tag/alpha/> *on February 4, 2013* [<http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/albers-boxes/>] *by asc* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/asc/>.

Introducing the Albers API method

cooperhewitt.objects.getAlbers

[API documentation](#) – [API methods](#) – [Create a new API key](#) – [Your API keys](#) – [Your access tokens](#)

*Please be aware that the API is still considered **experimental**. Anything you're seeing here is a good indicator of what the final API will look like but to the degree that we are still working through the details we'd like to reserve the right to change things, as needed, for a while longer.*

cooperhewitt.objects.getAlbers

Return a Josef Albers color triple

Method

POST

Arguments

- **access_token** — A valid [OAuth2 access token](#) *required*
- **id** — A valid Cooper-Hewitt object ID. *required*

Example

```
curl -X POST -F "method=cooperhewitt.objects.getAlbers" \
-F "id=<ID>" \
https://api.collection.cooperhewitt.org/rest/
```

We recently added a [method](http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/api/methods/cooperhewitt.objects.getAlbers) to our Collection API which allows you to get any object's "Albers" color codes. This is a pretty straightforward method where you pass the API an object ID, and it returns to you a triple of color values in hex format.

As an experiment, I thought it would be fun to write a short script which uses our API to grab a random object, grab its Albers colors, and then use that info to build an Albers inspired image. So here goes.

For this project I chose to work in Python as I already have some experience with it, and I know it has a decent imaging library. I started by using [pycurl](http://pycurl.sourceforge.net/) to au-

authenticate with our API storing the result in a buffer and then using [simplejson](http://pypi-simplejson.org/) <http://pypi-simplejson.org/> to parse the results. This first step grabs a random object using the [getRandom API method](http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/api/methods/cooperhewitt.objects.getRandom). <http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/api/methods/cooperhewitt.objects.getRandom>

```
api_token = 'YOUR-COOPER-HEWITT-TOKEN'

buf = cStringIO.StringIO()

c = pycurl.Curl()
c.setopt(c.URL, 'https://api.collection.cooperhewitt.org/rest')
d = {'method': 'cooperhewitt.objects.getRandom', 'access_token': api_token}

c.setopt(c.WRITEFUNCTION, buf.write)

c.setopt(c.POSTFIELDS, urllib.urlencode(d) )
c.perform()

random = json.loads(buf.getvalue())

buf.reset()
buf.truncate()

object_id = random.get('object', [])
object_id = object_id.get('id', [])

print object_id
```

I then use the object ID I got back to ask for the Albers color codes. The [getAlbers API](http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/api/methods/cooperhewitt.objects.getAlbers) <http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/api/methods/cooperhewitt.objects.getAlbers> method returns the hex color value and ID number for each “ring.” This is kind of interesting because not only do I know the color value, but I know what it refers to in our collection (period_id, type_id, and department_id).

```
d = {'method': 'cooperhewitt.objects.getAlbers', 'id': object_id , 'access_to-
ken': api_token}
```

```

c.setopt(c.POSTFIELDS, urllib.urlencode(d) )
c.perform()

albers = json.loads(buf.getvalue())

rings = albers.get('rings',[])
ring1color = rings[0]['hex_color']
ring2color = rings[1]['hex_color']
ring3color = rings[2]['hex_color']

print ring1color, ring2color, ring3color

buf.close()

```

Now that I have the ring colors I can build my image. To do this, I chose to follow the same pattern of concentric rings that Aaron talks about [in this post](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/albers-boxes/) <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/albers-boxes/>, introducing the Albers images as a visual language on our collections website. However, to make things a little interesting, I chose to add some randomness to the the size and position of each ring. Building the image in python was pretty easy using the [ImageDraw](http://www.pythonware.com/library/pil/handbook/imagenew.htm) <http://www.pythonware.com/library/pil/handbook/imagenew.htm> module

```

size = (1000,1000)
im = Image.new('RGB', size, ring1color)
draw = ImageDraw.Draw(im)

ring2coordinates = ( randint(50,100), randint(50,100) , randint(900, 950), randint(900,950))

print ring2coordinates

ring3coordinates = ( randint(ring2coordinates[0]+50, ring2coordinates[0]+100) , randint(ring2coordinates[1]+50, ring2coordinates[1]+100) , randint(ring2coordinates[2]-200, ring2coordinates[2]-50) , randint(ring2coordinates[3]-200, ring2coordinates[3]-50) )

print ring3coordinates

```

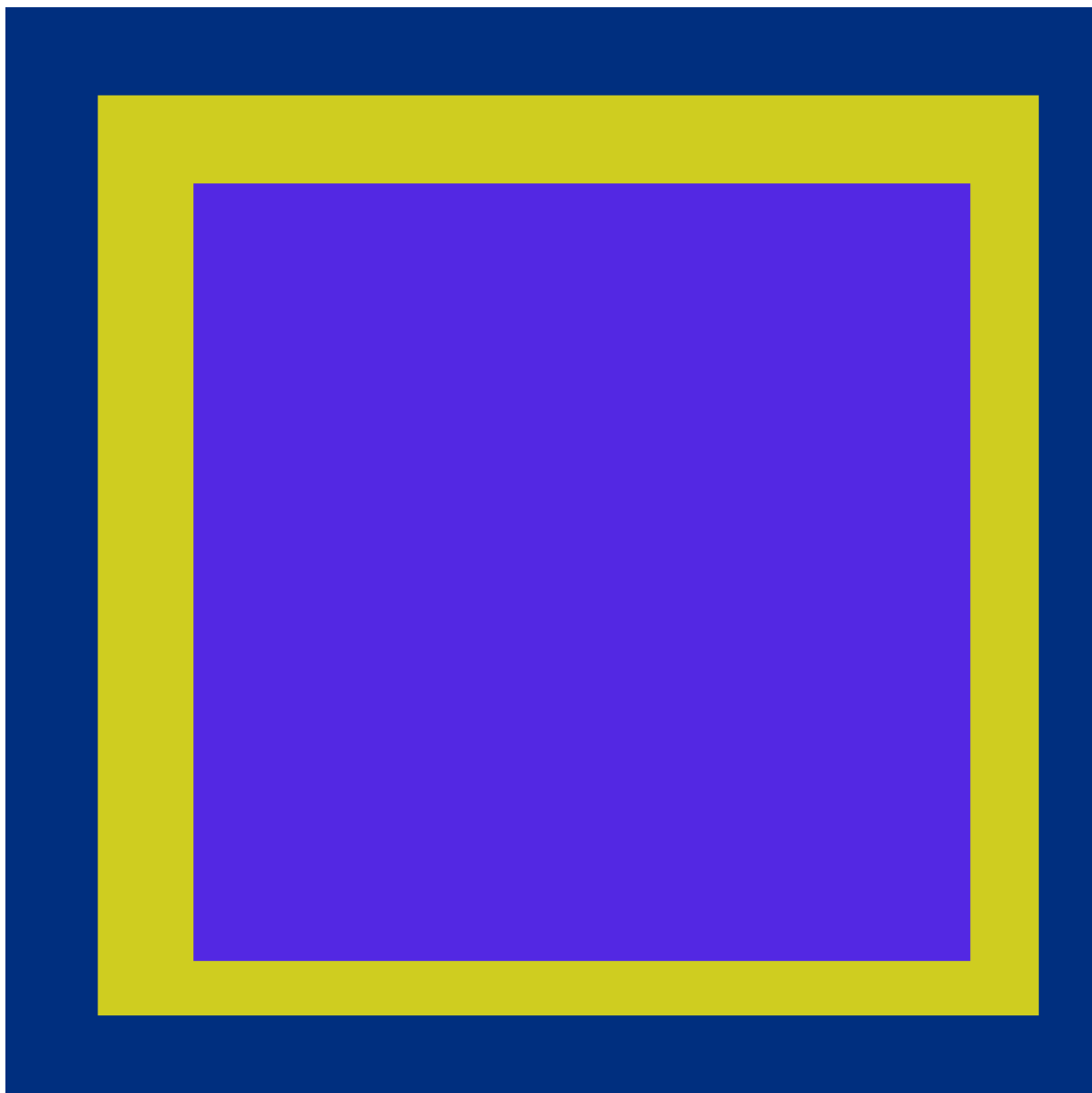
```
draw.rectangle(ring2coordinates, fill=ring2color)
draw.rectangle(ring3coordinates, fill=ring3color)

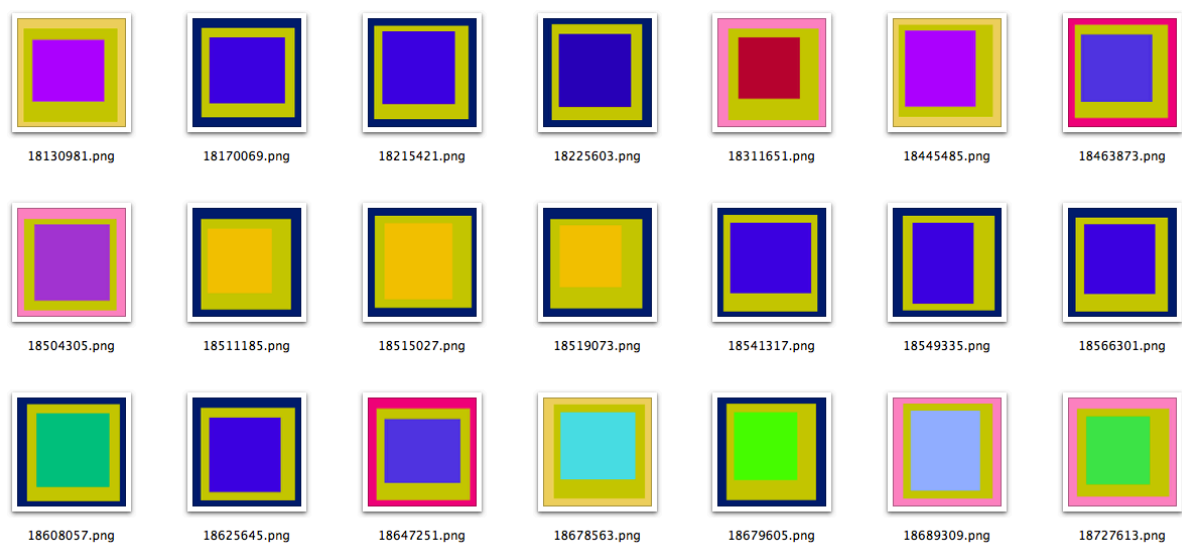
del draw

im.save('file.png', 'PNG')
```

The result are images that look like the one below, saved to my local disk. If you'd like to grab a copy of the full working python script for this, please [check out this Gist](https://gist.github.com/micahwalter/4724069) https://gist.github.com/micahwalter/4724069.

com/micahwalter/4724069 .





<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Screen-Shot-2013-01-29-at-3.54.45-PM.png>

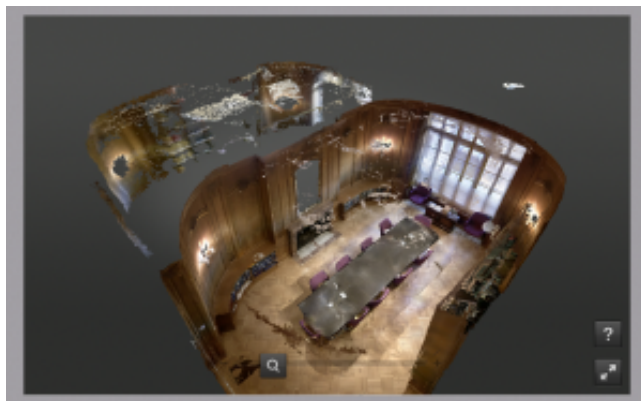
So, what can you humanities hackers do with it?

This entry was posted in CH 3.0 <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/ch-3-0/>, *Collection data* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/collection-data/> *on February 6, 2013* [<http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/experimenting-albers-api-method/>]
by micah <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/micah/>.

Exploring quickly made 3D models of the mansion

Restoring the Carnegie Mansion which provides the shell in which Cooper-Hewitt resides, gives a fantastic opportunity to test some 3D scanning. So in the latter part of 2012 we started exploring some of the options.

One local startup, [Floored.com](http://floored.com), came to do a test scan of our freshly restored [National Design Library](http://www.cooperhewitt.org/collections/library). In just *15 minutes* their Matterport camera had scanned the room and their servers were generating a navigable 3D model. This is much more than a 360 panorama, it is a proper 3D model, and one that could, with more clean up be used for exhibition design purposes as much as general playfulness.



<http://depot.lofty.com/scans/proud-pepper-8714/a/00>

We're pretty excited to see what is becoming possible with quick scanning. Whilst these models aren't high enough resolution right now, the trade off between speed and quality is becoming less and less every year.

We're sharing this, too, because of the way the unmasked mirror in the scan has created a 'room that isn't there'. It would be a good place to hide treasure if the 3D model ever ended up in a game engine.

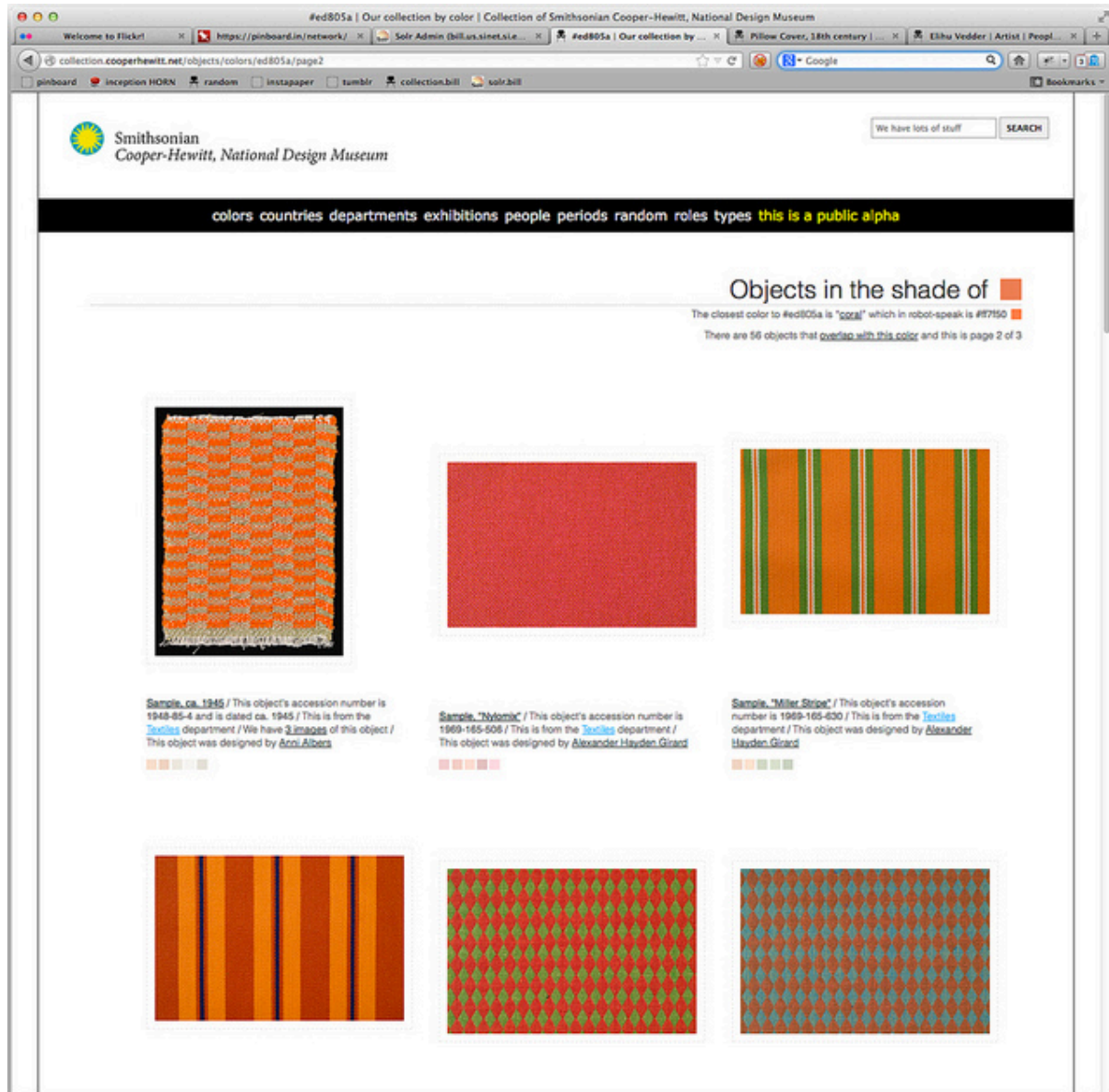
Go have [an explore](http://depot.lofty.com/scans/proud-pepper-8714/a/00).

This entry was posted in Digitization <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/digitization/> on February 9, 2013

[<http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/exploring-quickly-3d-models-mansion/>] *by Seb*

Chan <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/seb/>.

"All your color are belong to Giv"



Today we enabled the ability to [browse the collections website by color](http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/colors/) <http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/colors/>. Yay!

Don't worry — you can also browse by [colour](http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/colours/) <http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/colours/> but since the Cooper-Hewitt is part of the Smithsonian I will continue to use US Imperial Fahrenheit spelling for the rest of this blog post.

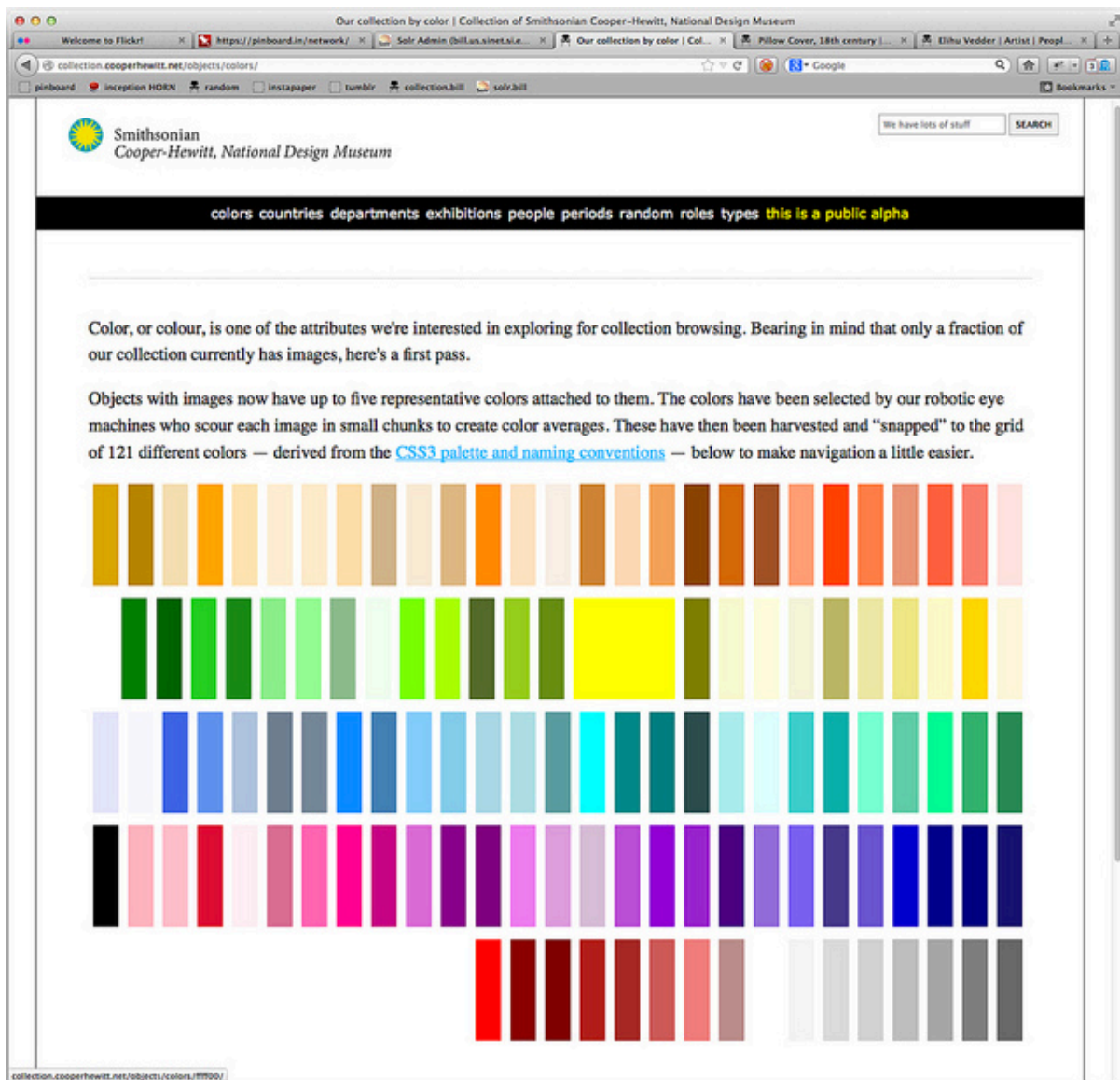
Objects with images now have up to five representative colors attached to them. The colors have been selected by our robotic eye machines who scour each image in small chunks to create color averages. We use a two-pass process to do this:

- First, we run every image through [Giv Parvaneh's](http://www.givp.org/) handy color analysis tool [RoyGBiv](https://github.com/givp/RoyGBiv). Giv's tool calculates both the average color of an image and a palette of up to five predominant colors. This is all based on the work Giv did for version two of the [Powerhouse Museum's Electronic Swatchbook](http://www.freshand-new.org/2009/07/electronic-swatchbook-version-2-lots-more-public-domain-swatches-search-by-color-2/), back in 2009.
- Then, for each color in the palette list (we aren't interested in the average) we calculate the nearest color in the [CSS3 color spectrum](http://www.w3.org/TR/css3-color/#svg-color). We "snap" each color to the CSS3 grid, so to speak.

We store all the values but only index the CSS3 colors. When someone searches the collection for a given color we do the same trick and snap their query back down to a manageable set of 121 colors rather than trying to search for things across the millions of shades and variations of colors that modern life affords us.

Our databases aren't set up for doing complicated color math across the entire collection so this is a nice way to reduce the scope of the problem, especially since this is just a "first draft". It's been interesting to see how well the CSS3 palette maps to the array of colors in the collection. There are some dubious matches but overall it has served us very well by sorting things in to accurate-enough buckets that ensure a reasonable spread of objects for each query.

We also display the palette for the object's primary image on the object page (for those things that have been digitized).



We're not being very clever about how we sort the objects or how we let you choose to sort the objects (you can't) which is mostly a function of knowing that the database layer for all of this will change soon and not getting stuck working on fiddly bits we know that we're going to replace anyway.

There are [lots of different palettes out there](http://observatory.designobserver.com/michaelbierut/feature/chromatophobia/37586/) <http://observatory.designobserver.com/michaelbierut/feature/chromatophobia/37586/> and as we start to make better sense of the boring technical stuff we plan to expose more of them on the site itself. In the process of doing all this work we've also released a couple more pieces of software on Github:

- [color-utils](https://github.com/straup/color-utils) <https://github.com/straup/color-utils> is a mostly a grab bag of tools and tests and dif-

ferent palettes that I wrote for myself as we were building this. The palettes are plain vanilla JSON files and at the moment there are lists for the [CSS3 colors](http://www.w3.org/TR/css3-color/#svg-color), Wikipedia's list of [Crayola crayon colors](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Crayola_crayon_colors), the various [shades of SOME-COLOR pages](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Special%3ASearch&profile=default&search=shades+of+color&fulltext=Search) on Wikipedia, both as a single list and bucketed by family (red, green, etc.) and the Scandawegian [Natural Colour System](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_Color_System) mostly just because [Frankie Roberto](http://www.frankieroberto.com/) told me about it this morning.

- [palette-server](https://github.com/cooperhewitt/palette-server) is a very small WSGI-compliant HTTP pony (or “[httpony](https://pinboard.in/u:straup/t:httpony)”) that wraps Giv's color analyzer and the snap-to-grid code in a simple web interface. We run this locally on the machine with all the images and the site code simply passes along the path to an image as a GET parameter. Like this:

```
curl 'http://localhost:8000?path=/Users/asc/Desktop/cat.jpg' | python -m json.tool

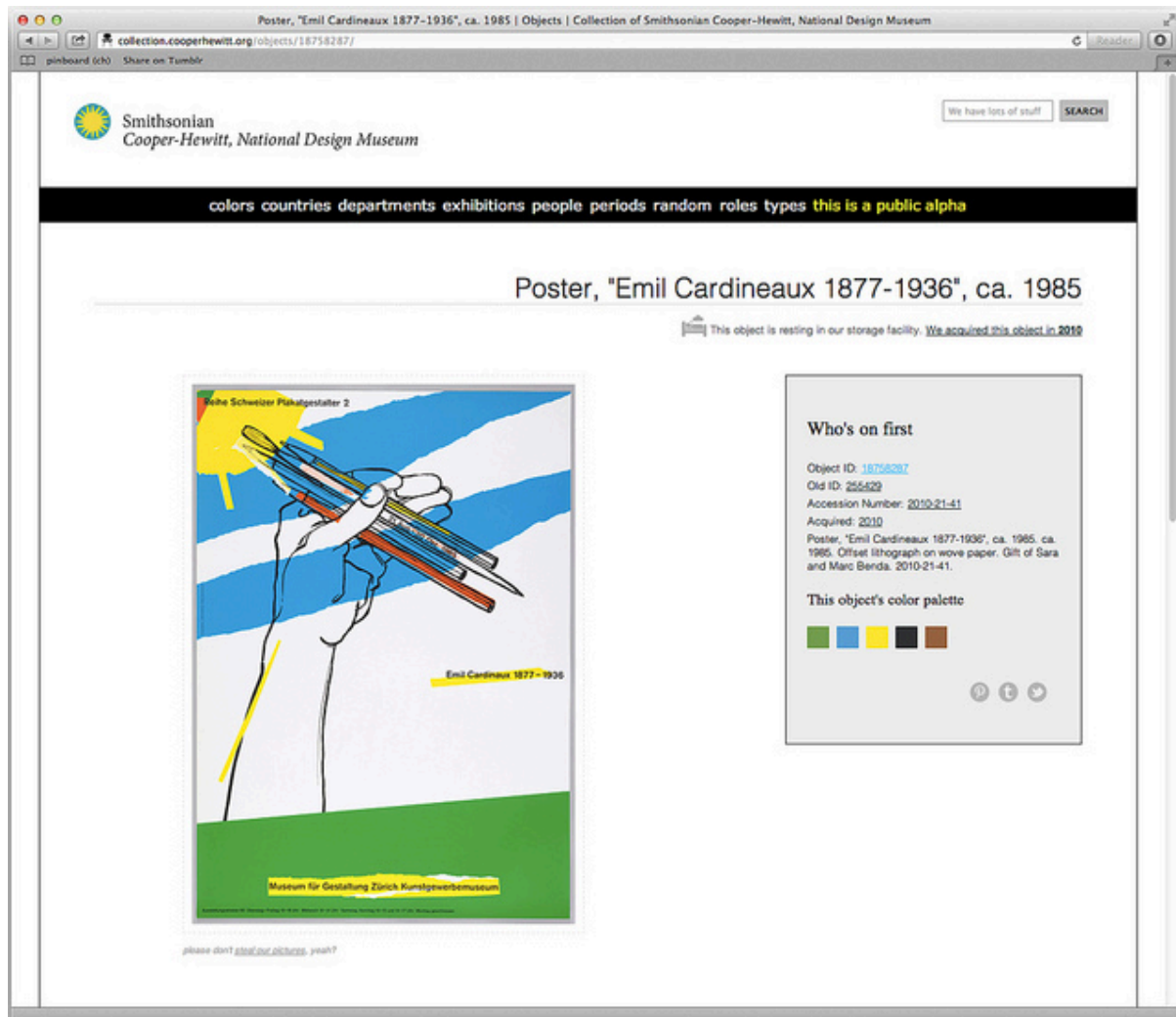
{
  "reference-closest": "css3",
  "average": {
    "closest": "#808080",
    "color": "#8e895a",
  },
  "palette": [
    {
      "closest": "#a0522d",
      "color": "#957d34",
    }

    ... and so on ...

  ]
}
```

This allows us to offload all the image processing to third-party libraries and people who are smarter about color wrangling than we are.

Both pieces of code are pretty rough around the edges so we'd welcome your thoughts and contributions. Pretty short on my TO DO list is to merge the code to snap-to-grid using a user-defined palette back in to the HTTP palette server.



As I write this, color palettes are not exposed in either the [API](https://collection.cooperhewitt-t.org/api/methods/) <https://collection.cooperhewitt-t.org/api/methods/> or the [collections metadata dumps](https://github.com/cooperhewitt/collection) <https://github.com/cooperhewitt/collection> but that will happen in pretty short order. Also, a page to select objects based on a random color but I just thought of that as I was copy-paste-ing the links for those other things that I need to do first...

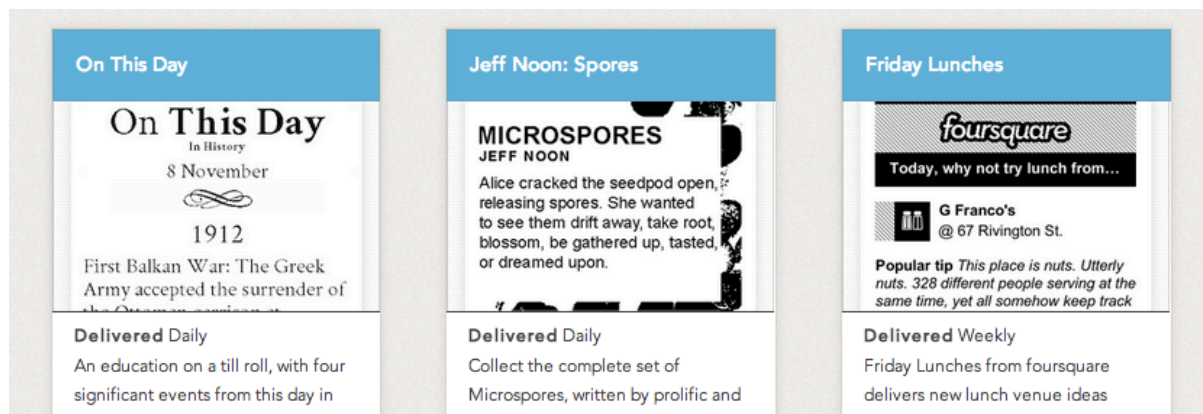
In the meantime, head on over to [the collections website](http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/colors/) <http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/colors/> and have a poke around.

This entry was posted in CH 3.0 <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/ch-3-0/> *and tagged alpha* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/tag/alpha/> *on February 13, 2013* [<http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/giv-do/>] *by asc* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/asc/>.

Little Printer Experiments

We are fans of the [Little Printer](http://bergcloud.com/littleprinter/) <http://bergcloud.com/littleprinter/> here in das labs, so when it was re-released last year and our Printers arrived, we started brainstorming ideas for a Cooper-Hewitt publication.

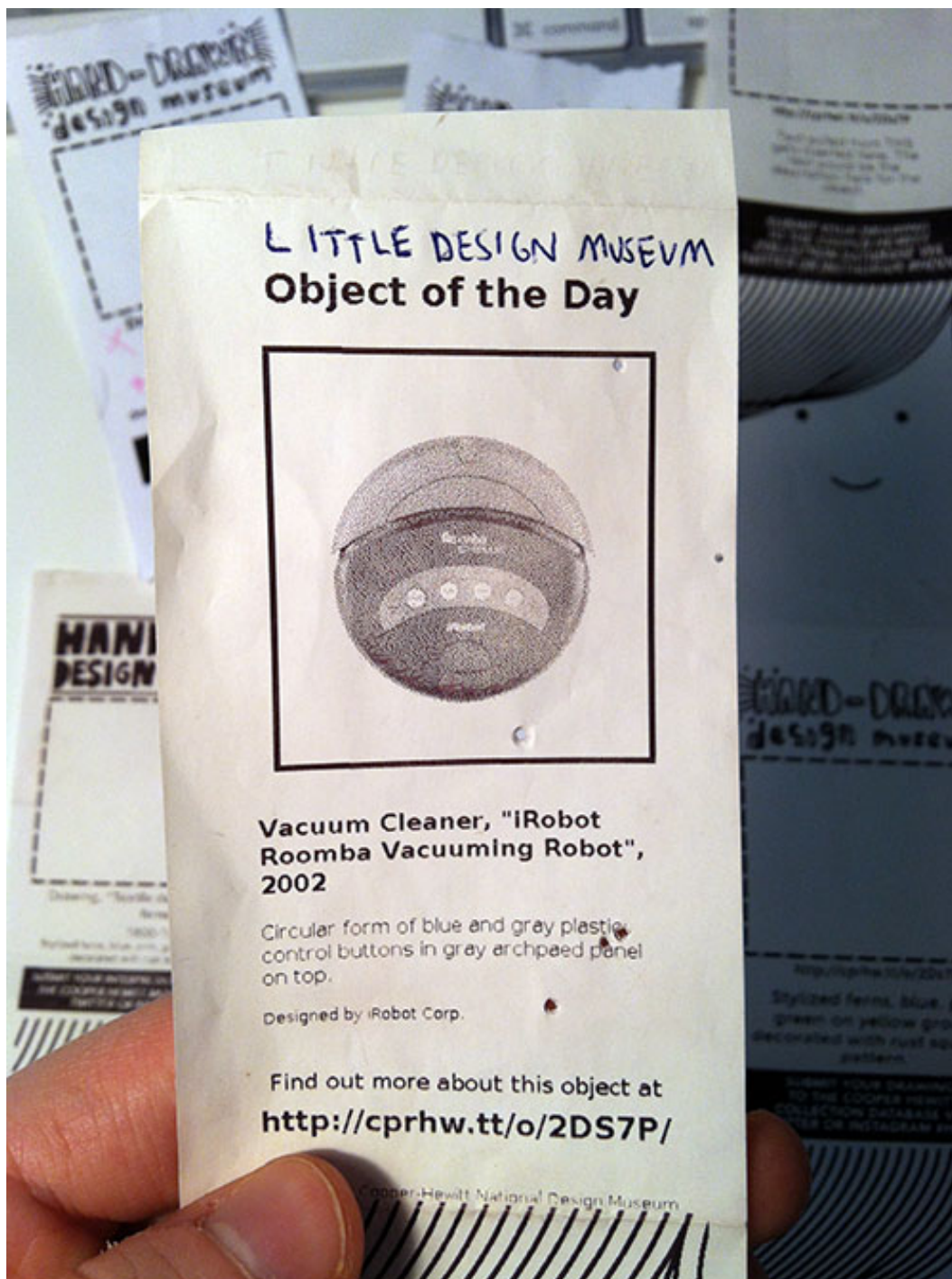
In a nutshell Little Printer is a cute little device that delivers a mini personalized newspaper to you every day. You choose which publications you want to receive, such as 'Butterfly of the Day' or 'Birthday Reminders'. LP publications are created by everyone from the BBC to ARUP to individual illustrators and designers looking to share their content in a unique way.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Screen-Shot-2013-04-08-at-4.02.53-PM.png>

some existing LP publications

The first thing we thought of doing was a simple print spinoff of the existing and popular series on our blog called [Object of the Day](http://www.cooperhewitt.org/object-of-the-day). <http://www.cooperhewitt.org/object-of-the-day>



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/object-of-the-day.jpg>

Aaron's first stab at simply translating our existing Object of the Day blog series into (Little) print format.

Then we tried a few more iterations that were more playful, taking advantage of Little Printer's nichy-ness as a space for us to let our institutional hair down.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/little-design-museum.jpg>

We tried to go full-blown with the decorative arts kitsch, but it came out kind of boring/didn't really work.

Another interesting way to take it was making the publication a two-way communication as opposed to one-way, i.e., not just announcing the Object of the Day, but rather asking people

to do something with the printout, like using it as a voting ballot or a coloring book. (([Rap Coloring Book](#) <http://bergeloud.com/2013/01/25/how-publications-happen-a-case-study/> is a publication that lets you color in a different rapper each week, I think it's pretty popular. I was also thinking of the simple digital-to-analog-to-digital interaction behind Flickr's famous "[Our Tubes are Clogged](#)" contest of 2006 <http://idyeah.com/blog/2012/10/flickr-tubes-are-clogged/> which I read about in the book [Designing for Emotion](#) <http://www.abookapart.com/products/designing-for-emotion> (great book, I highly recommend).))

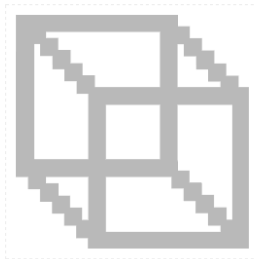


<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/dec-arts-death-match.jpg>

Took a stab at a horizontal print format with a simple voting interaction. Why has nobody designed a horizontal Little Printer publication yet? Somebody should do that...

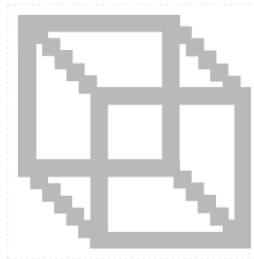
The idea everybody seemed to like most was asking people to draw their own versions of collection objects that currently have no image.

If you look on our Collections Online, you'll see that there are plenty of things in the collection that *"haven't had their picture taken yet."* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/albers-boxes/>



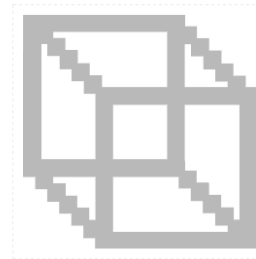
This object hasn't been digitized yet.

Drawing, "Two Octagons: Vigilance, Beneficence", ca. 1813 / This object's accession number is **1901-39-3259** and is dated **ca. 1813** ([Neoclassical](#)) / This is from the [Drawings, Prints, and Graphic Design](#) department / This object was designed by [Felice Giani](#)



This object hasn't been digitized yet.

Drawing, "Agamemnon Refuses to Liberate Chryseis; Minerva Appears to..." / This object's accession number is **1901-39-3327** and is dated **1802-05** ([Neoclassical](#)) / This is from the [Drawings, Prints, and Graphic Design](#) department / This object was designed by [Felice Giani](#)



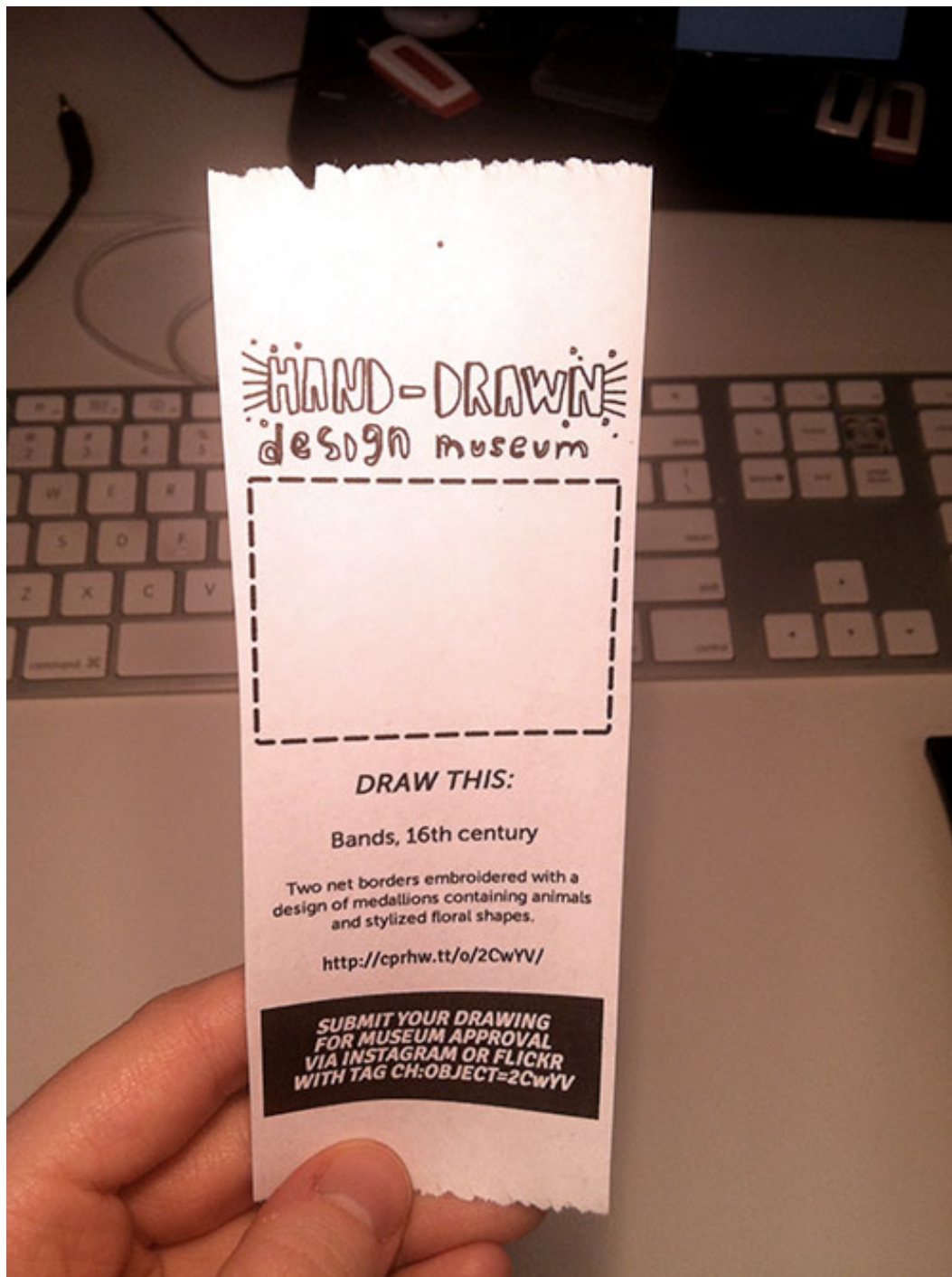
This object hasn't been digitized yet.

Drawing, 1802-05 / This object's accession number is **1901-39-3328** and is dated **1802-05** ([Neoclassical](#)) / This is from the [Drawings, Prints, and Graphic Design](#) department / This object was designed by [Felice Giani](#)

<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Screen-Shot-2013-04-09-at-12.58.08-PM.png>

Un-digitized (a.k.a. un-photographed) collections objects

I think this is a better interaction than simply voting for your favorite object because it actually generates something useful. Participants will help us give visual life to areas of our database that sorely need it. Similar to how the [V&A](http://www.vam.ac.uk/) <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/crowdsourcing/> is using crowdsourcing to [crop 120,000 database images](#) <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/crowdsourcing/> or how the [Museum Victoria](http://museumvictoria.com.au/) <http://museumvictoria.com.au/> in Australia is generating alt-text for thousands of images with their *"Describe Me"* <http://describeme.museumvictoria.com.au/> project. The Little Printer platform adds a layer of cute analog quirk to what many museums and libraries are [already doing with crowdsourcing](http://www.digitalglam.org/crowdsourcing/crowdsourcing-projects/). <http://www.digitalglam.org/crowdsourcing/crowdsourcing-projects/>

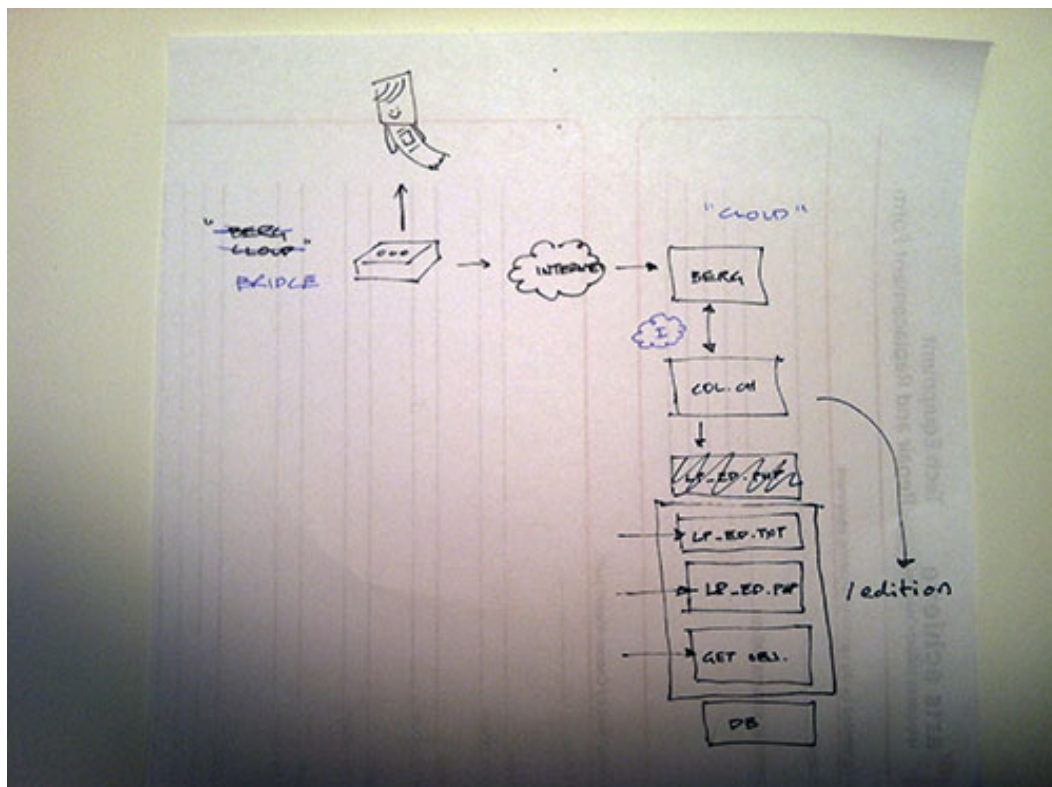


<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/final-one.jpg>

This prototype (now getting closer..) uses machine tags to allow people to link their drawings directly to our database. I printed this with an inkjet printer so it looks a little sharper than the Little Printer heat paper will look.

Lately at the museum we've been talking about [Nina Simon's "golden rule"](#) of asking

questions <http://museumtwo.blogspot.com/2009/04/design-techniques-for-developing.html> of museum visitors—that you should only ask if you actually CARE about the answer. This carries over to interaction design, you shouldn't ask people for a gratuitous vote, doodle, pic, tweet, or whatever. I think some of the enjoyment that people will get out of subscribing to this publication and sending in their drawings will be the feeling that they're helping the Museum in some way. [We know that there aren't that many Little Printers circulating out there in the world but we do think that those early adopters who do have them will be entertained and perhaps, predisposed to playing with us.]



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/aaron-drawing.jpg>

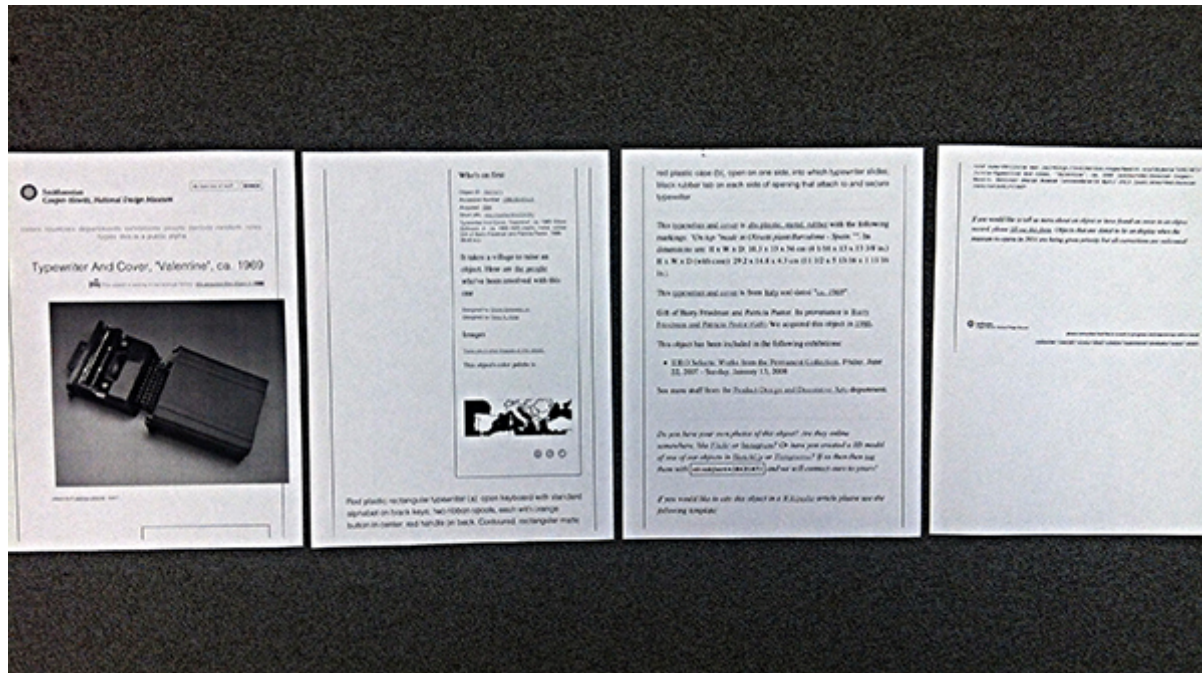
A typical Aaron diagram.

The edition runs as part of the collections website itself (aka “parallel-TMS” <http://www.aaronland.info/weblog/2012/11/09/jello/#parallel-tms>). We chose to do this instead of running it externally on its own and using the collection API because it’s “fewer moving parts to manage” (according to Aaron). Here’s a little picture that Aaron drew for me when he was explaining how & where the publication would run. If you’re interested in doing a standalone publication, though, there are [several templates on GitHub](http://remote.bergcloud.com/developers/examples/) <http://remote.bergcloud.com/developers/examples/> you can use as a starting point.

We'll see how people *actually* engage with [the publication](http://remote.bergcloud.com/publications/111) <http://remote.bergcloud.com/publications/111> and iterate accordingly...

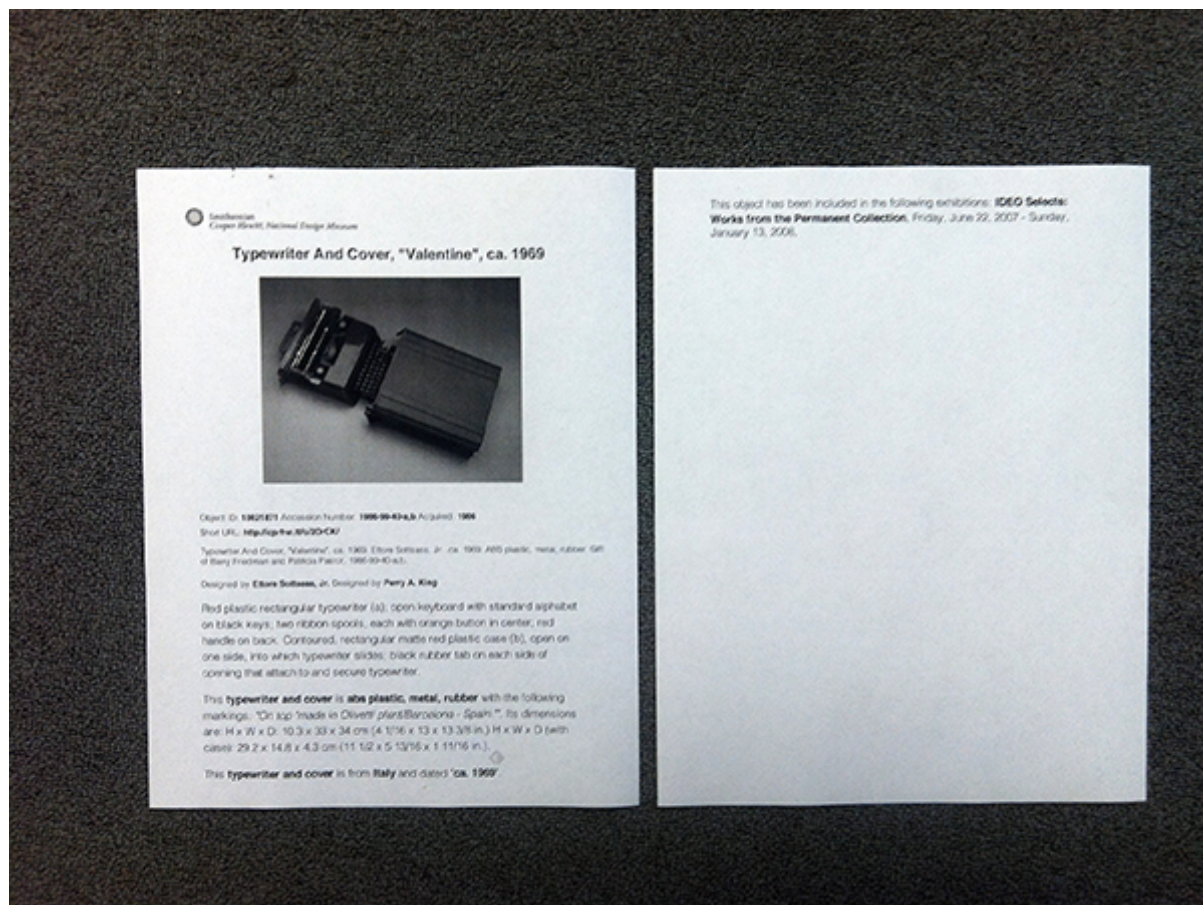
This entry was posted in [CH 3.0](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/ch-3-0/) <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/ch-3-0/>, *Collection data* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/collection-data/>, *Publishing* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/publishing/>, *Things We Like* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/things-we-like/> and tagged [alpha](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/tag/alpha/) <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/tag/alpha/> on April 15, 2013 [\[http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/printer-experiments/\]](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/printer-experiments/) by [katieshelly](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/katieshelly/) <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/katieshelly/>.

I made us a print stylesheet for object pages on the collections website. (What does that mean? It means you can print out the webpage and it will look nice).



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/print-css-before.jpg>

Printout of Object #18621871.. before stylesheet.

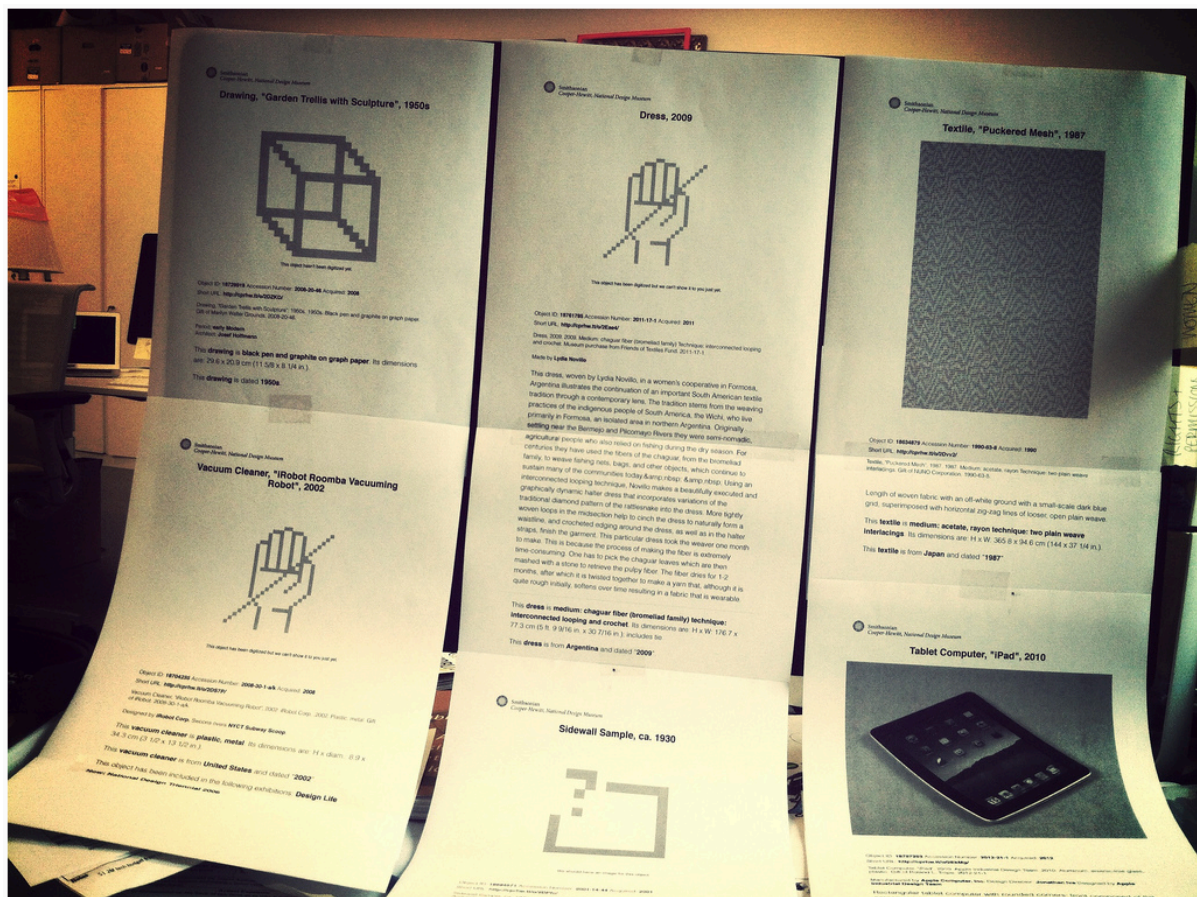


<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/print-css-after.jpg>

Printout of Object #18621871 after stylesheet. Much better. Office carpet courtesy of Tandus flooring.

This should be very useful for us in-house, especially curators and education.. and anyone doing exhibition planning.. (which right now is many of us).

It's not very fancy or anything. Basically I just stripped away all the extraneous information and got right to the essential details, kind of like designing for mobile.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Screen-Shot-2013-04-15-at-4.56.13-PM.png>

cascading style sheet is cascading.

In a moment of caffeinated Friday goofiness, Aaron printed out a bunch of weird objects he found (e.g. iPad [described for aliens](http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18797293/) <http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18797293/> as “rectangular tablet computer with rounded corners”) and Scotch taped them all over Seb’s computer screen as a nice decorative touch for his return the next morning.

What we realized in looking at all the printouts, though, is that the simplified view of a collection record resembles a gallery wall label. And we’re currently knee-deep in the wall label discussion here at the Museum as we re-design the galleries (what does it need? what doesn’t it need? what can it do? how can it delight? how can it inform?).

I don’t yet have any conclusions to draw from that observation.. other than it’s a good frame to talk about our content and its presentation.

..to be continued!

This entry was posted in Basics <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/basics/>, *CH 3.0* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/ch-3-0/>, *Collection data* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/collection-data/>, *Publishing* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/publishing/> and tagged *alpha* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/tag/alpha/> on April 17, 2013 [<http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/cmd-p/>] by *katieshelly* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/katieshelly/>.

Welcome to object phone. Your call has been placed in a queue.

I made another small thing. Again, another way for me to experiment with the [Collection API](https://collection.cooperhewitt.org/api/), and again, another way to experiment with new ways of accessing the collection. This time, there aren't many screen shots to display—there is no website to look at. This time, it's "Welcome to object phone!"

(718) 213-4915

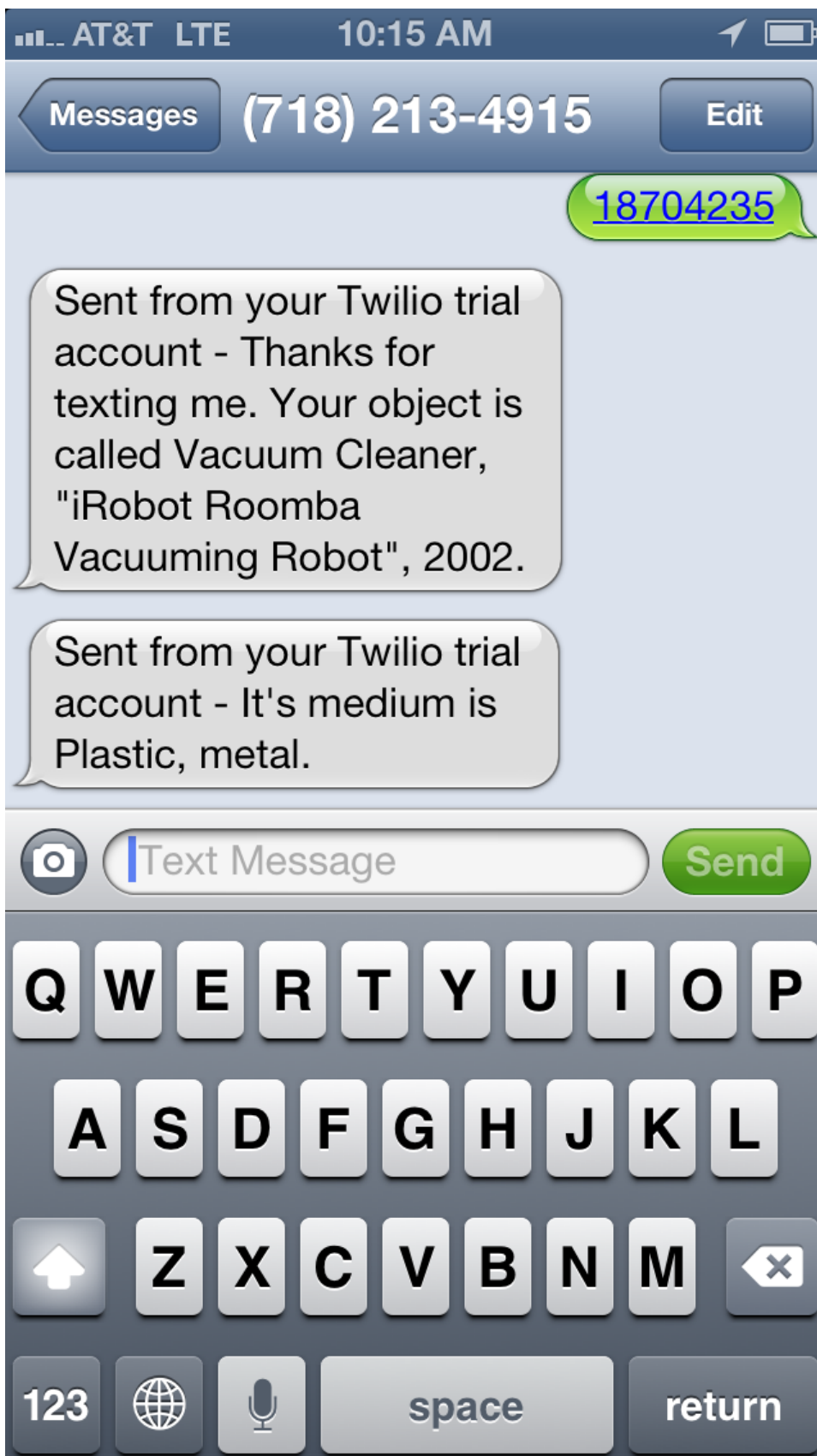
"Object Phone" <https://github.com/cooperhewitt/objectphone> is (presently) a very, very simple implementation of a way to explore our collection by dialing a telephone, or sending a text message. I had been thinking of a few of the more popular museum oriented audio tour products, and how they all seem to be very CMS style in their design, and wondering if we could just use our own API.

For example, [TourML and TAP](http://tapintomuseums.org) (which offer the web programmer a very powerful framework for programming a mobile guide using the Drupal CMS) are very nice, but they are still very dependent on content production. The developer or content manager has to build and curate all of the content for the "tour." This might be a good way to go about things, especially if you are leaning on an existing Drupal installation for a good deal of your content, but I was looking for a way to access existing data, and specifically the data in our collection website.

In the beginning of developing our collection website, we went through the process of assigning EVERYTHING a unique "bigint" <http://dev.mysql.com/doc/refman/4.1/en/integer-types.html> in the form of what we are referring to as an "artisial integer" <http://brooklynintegers.com>." This means that each object record, each person record and each, well, everything else has a unique integer which no other thing can have. This is not in place of accession numbers—we will probably always have accession numbers The nice thing about unique integers is that they're really easy to deal with on a programmatic level.

For example, if you text 18704235 to 718-213-4915 you should get a response that looks like the screenshot below. In fact you can text any object id number from our collection and get a

similar response.



You can also dial that same number and use your keypad to either search the collection by object ID, or ask for a random object. The application will respond to you using a text to speech converter, which is usually pretty good.

Presently, the app is not replying with a whole lot of information. You essentially get the object's title and medium field if it has one. In many cases, asking for a random object may just result in something like "Drawing." Many of our object records don't have much more useful information than this, and also, I am trying to wrangle with the idea of how much information is useful in a voice and text message (with a 160 character limit per SMS).

The whole system is leveraging the [Twilio](http://twilio.com) <http://twilio.com> service and API. Twilio offers quite a range of possibilities, and I am very excited to experiment with more. For example, instead of text to speech, Twilio can play back .wav files. Additionally, Twilio can do things like dial another phone number, forward calls and record the caller's voice. There are so many possibilities here that I won't even begin to list them, but for example, I could easily see us using this to capture user feedback in our galleries by phone and text.

I'm very interested in figuring out a way to search by voice. I'm sort of dreaming of programming the thing to go "Why don't you just *tell* me the object number!" as in this great episode of Seinfeld which you can watch by clicking the image below.



http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qM79_itR0Nc If you are interested, I have also made the code public on [this Gist](#) <https://gist.github.com/micahwalter/5407518>. It's pretty messy and redundant right now, but you'll get the idea.

One of the more complicated aspects of this project will be designing the phone interface so it makes sense. Currently, once you hear an object play back, the system just hangs up on you. It would be nice to offer the user a better way to manipulate the system which is still pleasant and easy to understand. By that same token, there is a completely different approach that is needed for the SMS end of things as you don't really have a menu tree, but instead of list of possible commands the user need to learn. Fortunately, there is a ton of great work that has already been accomplished in this arena, specifically by the [Walker Art Center's](#) <http://www.walkerart.org/> very long running and very yellow website [Art on Call](#). <http://newmedia.walkerart.org/aoc/index.wac>

Source code at github.com/cooperhewitt/objectphone <https://github.com/cooperhewitt/objectphone>

This entry was posted in [Backends](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/backends/) [, CH 3.0](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/backends/) <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/ch-3-0/>, *Collection data* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/collection-data/> *and tagged* [alpha](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/tag/alpha/) <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/tag/alpha/> *on April 18, 2013* [<http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/object-phone/>] *by* [micah](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/micah/) <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/micah/>.

tms-tools == this is a blog post about code



<http://www.flickr.com/photos/straup/8663224961/>

icebergs are kind of like giant underwater unicorns when you think about it

tms-tools

This is a blog post about code. Which means it's really a blog post about data.

tms-tools is a suite of libraries and scripts to extract data from TMS as CSV files. Each database table is dumped as a separate CSV file. That's it really.

It's a blog post about data. Which means it's really a blog post about control. It's a blog post about preserving a measure of control over *your own* data.

At the end of it all TMS is a MS-SQL database and, in 2013, it still feels like an epic struggle just to get the raw data out of TMS so that single task is principally what these tools deal with.

tms-tools is the name we gave to the first set of scripts and libraries we wrote when we undertook to [rebuild the collections website](http://collection.cooperhewitt.org) <http://collection.cooperhewitt.org> in the summer of 2012. The first step in that journey was creating a read-only clone of the collections database.

Quite a lot of this functionality can be accomplished from the TMS or MS-SQL applications themselves but that involves running a Windows machine and pressing a lot of buttons. This code is designed to be part of an otherwise automated system for working with your data.

TMS will remain the ultimate source of truth for our collection metadata but for us TMS didn't turn out to be the best choice for developing and managing the public face of that data. The code in the tms-tools repository is meant to act as a bridge between those two different needs.

There is no attempt to interpret the data or the reconcile the twisty maze of relationships between the many tables in TMS. That is left as an exercise to the reader. This is not a one-button magic pony. This is code that works for us today. It has issues. If you choose to use it you will probably discover new issues. Yay, adventure!

We're making the tms-tools code [available today on Github](https://github.com/cooperhewitt/tms-tools) <https://github.com/cooperhewitt/tms-tools>, released under a BSD license.

*We are making this code available because we know many others in our community face similar challenges. Maybe the work we've done so far can help others and **going forward we can try to make things a little better, together.***

This entry was posted in CH 3.0 <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/ch-3-0/> *and tagged alpha* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/tag/alpha/> *on April 19, 2013* [<http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/tms-tools-this-is-a-blog-post-about-code/>] *by* **ASC** <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/asc/> .

We won an award



The annual international gathering that is [Museums and the Web](http://mw2013.museumsandtheweb.com) has just passed and this year we were lucky enough to win one of the Best of the Web Awards in the Research/Collections category.

We are especially proud of this award because it represents critical evaluation by our peers. And we love that they called out its tone, experimental nature, and its early alpha release. These are exactly the qualities that we believe offer the most to others in the field – something that shiny, polished, and ‘finished’ projects often don’t. What we are doing can (and perhaps, should) be copied by others.

We dedicate the award to [Bill Moggridge](http://www.cooperhewitt.org/remembering-bill/life-work) and we’d like to particularly thank the generosity of curatorial and registration staff in letting us experiment to try re-inventing the collections online paradigm – a task that is far from over.

Congratulations to all the other winners – it is nice to be in such great [company](http://mw2013.museumsandtheweb.com/best-of-the-web-winners/) !

This entry was posted in Conferences <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/conferences/> *and tagged*

alpha <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/tag/alpha/>, *awards* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/tag/awards/>, *MW2013* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/tag/mw2013/> *on April 22, 2013* [<http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/we-won-an-award/>] *by Seb Chan* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/seb/>.

And another award!



This time we picked up a Gold award from the American Association of Museum's Media and Technology MUSE awards. We won in the 'APIs and applications' category against some stiff competition from some very polished tablet and mobile apps. The category rewards "digital presentations, applications, and mashups that utilize existing data and online resources to transform content into new meaningful tools or experiences."

Once again it is nice to see recognition, this time from the broader museum sector, for the value of 'public alpha' releases.

This entry was posted in Things We Like <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/things-we-like/> *and tagged*
alpha <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/tag/alpha/> *on May 28, 2013* [<http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/and-another-award/>] *by*
Seb Chan <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/seb/>.

Default Sort, or what would Shannon do?

Up until recently our collections website displayed search results ordered by, well, nothing in particular. This wasn't necessarily by design, we just didn't have any idea of how we should sort the results. We tossed around the idea of sorting things by date or alphabet, but this seemed kind of arbitrary. And as search results get more complex, 'keyword frequency' isn't necessarily equivalent to 'relevance'.

We added the ability on our '[fancy search](http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/search/fancy/)' to sort by all of these things, but we still needed a way to present search results by default.

Enter [Claude Shannon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claude_Shannon) and a bit of high level math (or 'maths' if, like some of the team, are from this thing called 'the Commonwealth').



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claude_Shannon

Claude Shannon

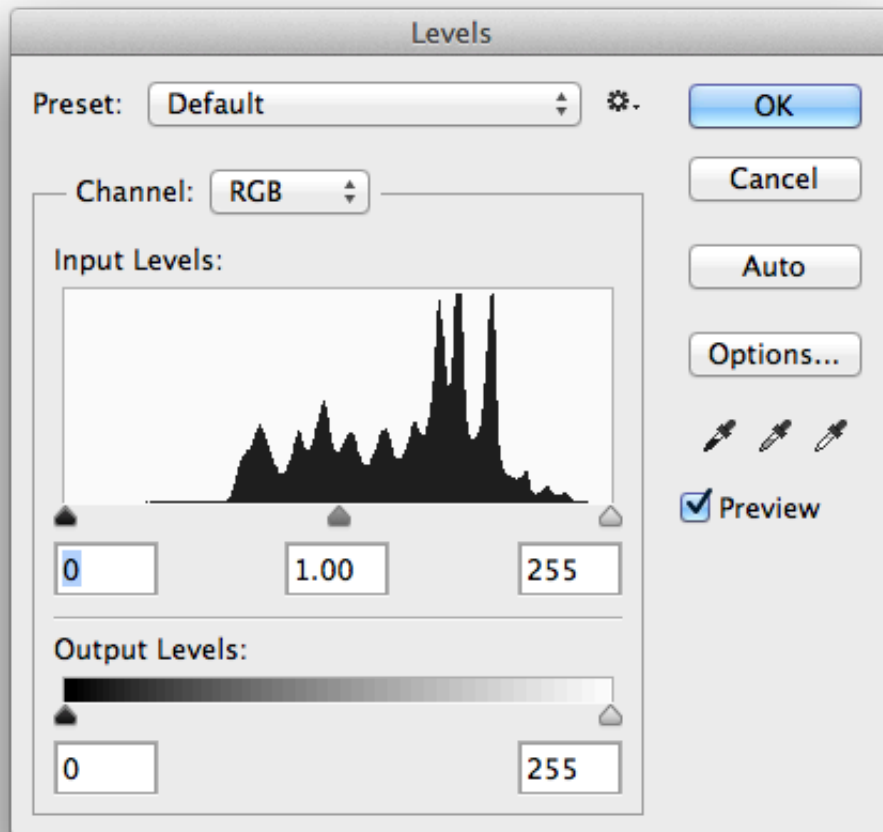
Claude Shannon was a pretty smart guy and back in 1948 in a paper titled "[A Mathematical Theory of Communication](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Mathematical_Theory_of_Communication)" he presented the idea of [Entropy, or information theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Entropy_(information_theory)). The concept is actually rather simple, and relies on a quick analysis of a dataset to discover the probability of different parts of data within the set.

For images you can think about it by looking at a histogram and thinking of the height of each bar in the histogram as a representation of the probability that a particular pixel value will be present. With this in mind you can get a sense of how "complex" an image is. Images with really flat histograms (lots of pixel values present lots of times) will have a very high Entropy, where as images with severely spiked histograms (all black or all white for example) will have a very low Entropy.

In other words, images with more fine detail have a higher Entropy and are more complicated to express, and usually take up more room on disk when compressed.



Think of an image of a wallpaper pattern like this one. It has a really high Entropy value because within the image there is lots of fine detail and texture. If we look at the histogram for the image we can see that there are lots of pixel values represented pretty evenly across the graph with a few spikes in the middle most likely representing the overall palette of the image.

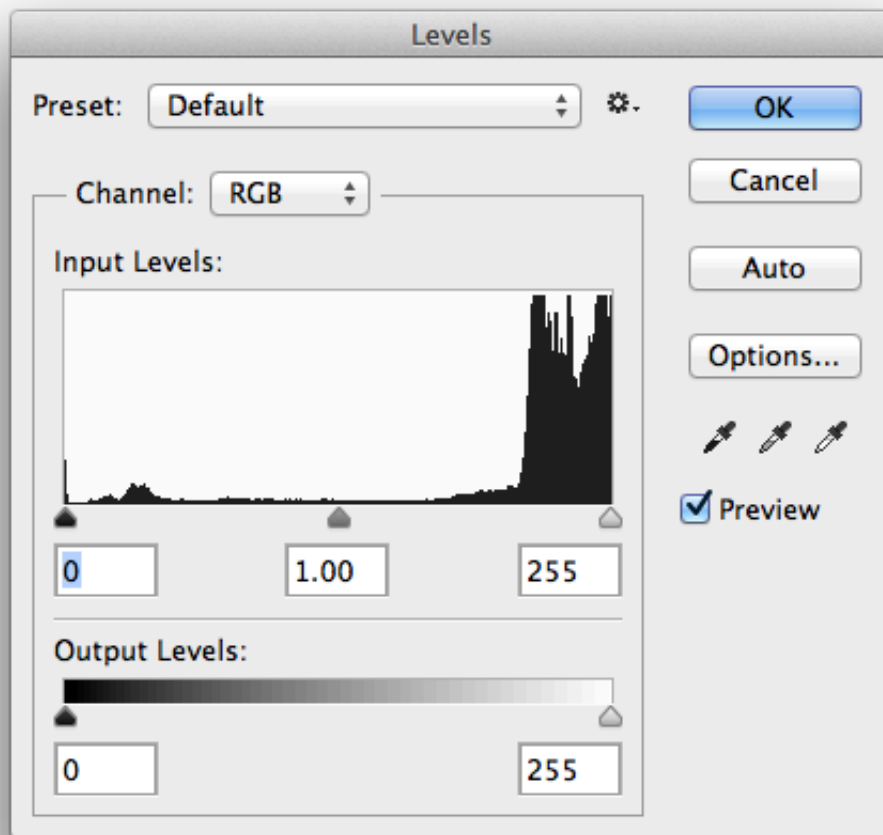


<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Screen-Shot-2013-06-21-at-10.24.25-AM.png>

On the other hand, check out this image of a pretty smooth vase on a white background. The histogram for this image is less evenly distributed, leaning towards the right of the graph and thus has a much lower Entropy value.



http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/35383_6605e4abaf3b2ef9_b.jpg



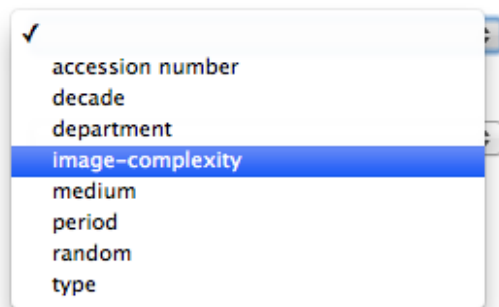
<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Screen-Shot-2013-06-21-at-10.36.42-AM.png> We thought it might be interesting to sort all of the images in our collection by Entropy, displaying the more complex and finer detailed images first, so I built a simple python script that takes an image as input and returns its “Shannon Entropy” as a float.

```
1 def shannon_entropy(img):
2
3     # calculate the shannon entropy for an image
4
5     histogram = img.histogram()
6     histogram_length = sum(histogram)
7
8     samples_probability = [float(h) / histogram_length for h in histogram]
```

```
9
10     return -sum([p * math.log(p, 2) for p in samples_probability if p != 0])
11
12
```

shannon-entropy.py <https://gist.github.com/micahwalter/5237697> [view raw](#) <https://gist.github.com/micahwalter/5237697/raw/shannon-entropy.py>
 ter/5237697#file-shannon-entropy-py hosted with ❤ by [GitHub](#) <https://github.com>

To chew through the entire collection we built this into a simple “[httpony](https://github.com/cooperhewitt/shannon-server)” and built a background task to run through every image in our collection and add its Shannon Entropy as a value in the collection database. We then indexed these values in Solr and added the option to sort by “image complexity” in our Fancy Search page.



than), the (less-than-or-equal) *for example*

sort results by

or facet results by

"Faceting" means that you take all the results for the distinct people in your result set or all the results for a facet by another field then but you can restrict the results by a parameter passed along with be ignored.

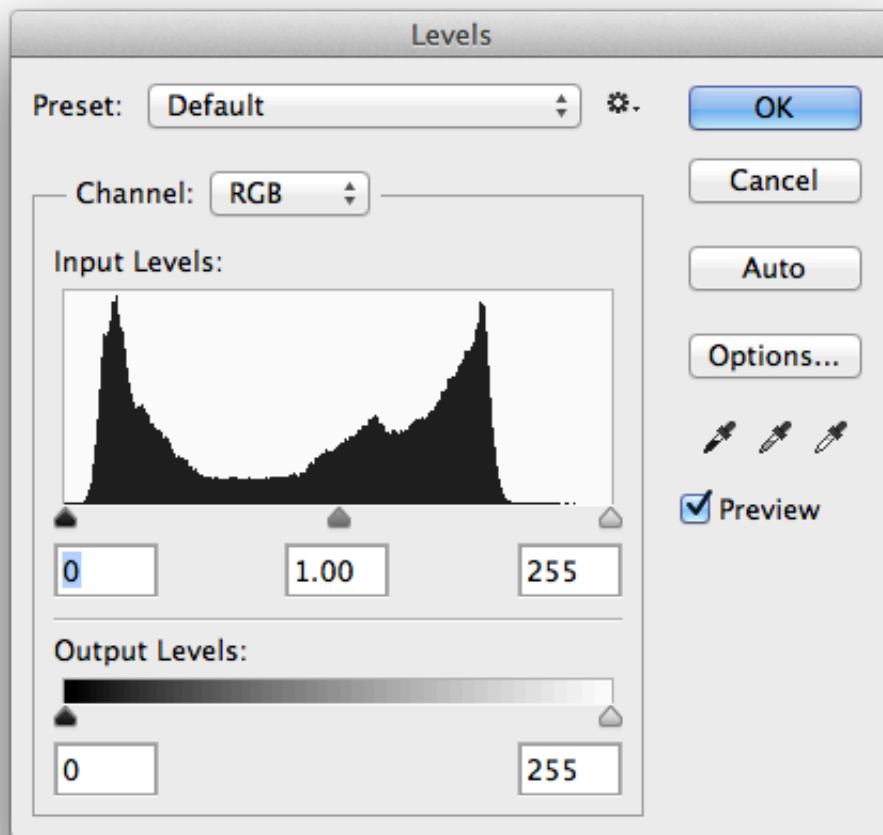
<http://3ug4ii3uortqp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpenqine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Screen-Shot-2013-06-21-at-10.41.49-AM.png>

Sorting by Shannon Entropy is kind of interesting, and we noticed right away that a small byproduct of this process is that objects that simply don't have an image wind up at the end of the sort. In the end we liked the search results so much that we made "image complexity" the default sort across the entire website. You can always go into [Fancy Search](http://collection-cooperhewitt.org/search/fancy/) http://collection-cooperhewitt.org/search/fancy/ and change the sort criteria to your liking, but we thought image complexity seemed to be a pretty good place to start.

But what is the relationship between Claude Shannon and [Shannen Doherty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shannen_Doherty)? Well, it looks like Shannen, herself, has a very high Shannon Entropy...



http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/tumblr_m5dc10iT8T1qzr8o4o1_500.jpg



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Screen-Shot-2013-06-21-at-10.58.46-AM.png>

This entry was posted in CH 3.0 <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/ch-3-0/> *and tagged alpha* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/tag/alpha/> *on June 21, 2013* [\[http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/default-sort-or-what-would-shannon-do/\]](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/default-sort-or-what-would-shannon-do/) *by micah* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/micah/>.

Interns React to...MoMA's Audio+

I spent my summer as an intern in the Digital and Emerging Media department here at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum. Next week, I head home to San Francisco where I will return to the graduate program in design at California College of the Arts. One of my projects this summer has been to visit museums, observe how visitors are using their devices (cell phones, iPads, etc), and to examine audio guides through the lens of an interaction designer.

Before you start, it's important to note that I ran over to try out the Audio+ out as soon as I could. The new guides are technically still in a pre-release phase and the team at MoMA is actively rolling out tweaks and fixes.

I arrived at the museum around 11 am (they open at 10.30) and already there was a pretty significant line for the mobile guide. After a bit of a wait, I exchanged my photo ID (note: passports and credit cards are not accepted) for the encased iPod touch. Although they are commonly used by museums as audio guides, this was the first time I had ever done an audio tour with an iPod touch and my expectations were lofty from the start. Hanging around my neck from a lanyard was a device full of content, and a device that I knew could connect my experience at MoMA to the world wide web! Cue sunburst and music from the heavens.



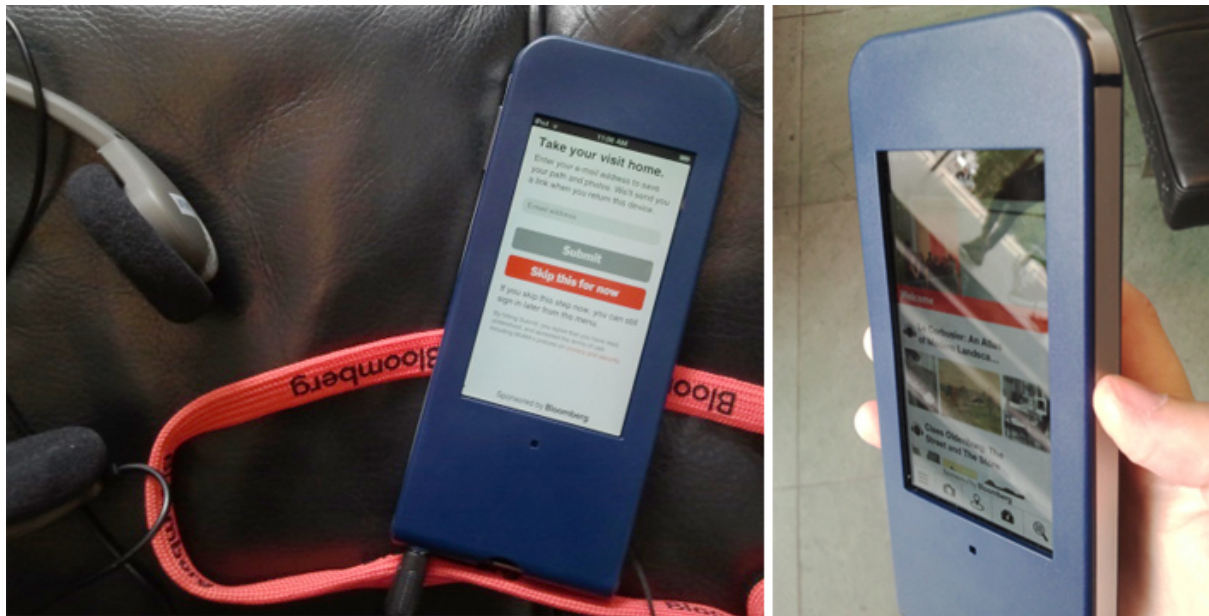
<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/lineforguides.jpg>

MoMA visitors waiting in line to pick up an audio guide

The guide is handed to you with the prompt to “Take your visit home” and here you can enter your email address, which I did, or skip this step and do it later (or not at all). The in-museum functionality is the same regardless of whether you decide to give them your email address or not.

Email address entered, ready to go.

...Or so I thought. After a few network connection failure screens, I took the guide back to the Audio+ desk and they inserted what looked like a folded up paperclip into a slot in the back of the case and pushed some kind of reset button. Not a big deal since I was still in the lobby, but it would have been nice to, as Nielsen’s [10 usability heuristics suggest](http://www.nngroup.com/articles/ten-usability-heuristics/), include some help and documentation outside of “network connection failure.” I assume this is one of the kinks being working out.



http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Audio_plus.jpg

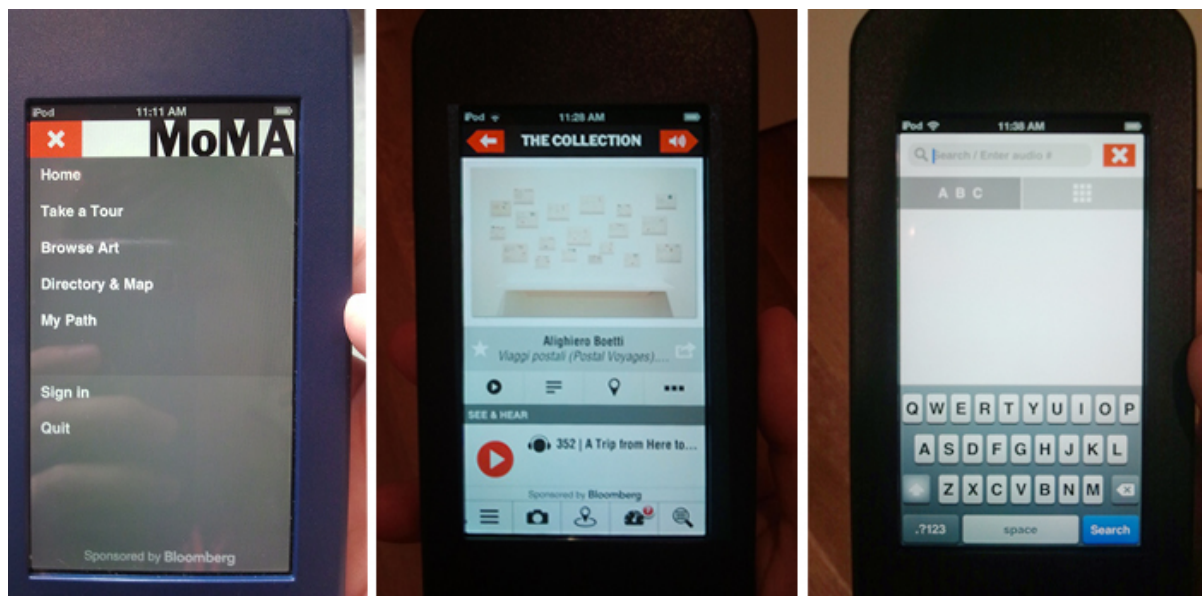
As I ambled around the third floor, I couldn't help but get pulled into the guide's glowing screen; it was a bit distracting, actually. The interface looks like a website; there are clickable images, clickable text, videos, a camera, and icon based navigation system. I spent at least 15 minutes playing around with the app not only trying to figure out what it could do, but trying to figure out what I should do. I had too many options and my attention was on the device in my hands rather than on the walls where it should have been. I wondered what else (besides explore content) I could do with the device. Is it going to navigate me through the maze of MoMA and tell me to turn right at the [Gilda Mantilla drawings](http://www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?criteria=0%3AAD%3AE%3A35082&page_number=1&template_id=1&sort_order=1) in order to get to the [A Trip from Here to There](http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/1361) exhibit? Does it know where I am? No, but I wish it did. This may be unavoidable, but I would be surprised if most visitors don't feel the same way. It's an iPod touch and I therefore expect it to do the things a Wi-Fi enabled iPod touch can do (mainly help me to find my way), but it doesn't...and I really want it to.

Once I stopped fidgeting with the new toy, the first thing I did with the guide was listen to an audio description of Alighiero Boetti's process in the piece *Viaggi postali* (*Postal Voyages*). The audio content was engaging and with the guide I could also read information, see the location within the museum, and...see related works! This last feature was my favorite; I love having a connection to something on the wall and immediately being able to see more from the artist. This was a significantly harder, however, when the piece I was interested in did not have the little audio icon on the label (which is true for

the majority of the work at MoMA).



I want info with a single tap or a simple search for all of the pieces on the walls, as I got for the Boetti piece, not just the ones with the audio icon. Unfortunately, access to extended content for artworks outside of the official tours meant effort because (without a clear alternative) my instinct was to search either the artist name or the title. As you can image, unfamiliar names and loooooong titles made this a tiresome process. The cognitive load was on me, the user, rather than on the technology. I want to access to the content **without** having to think.

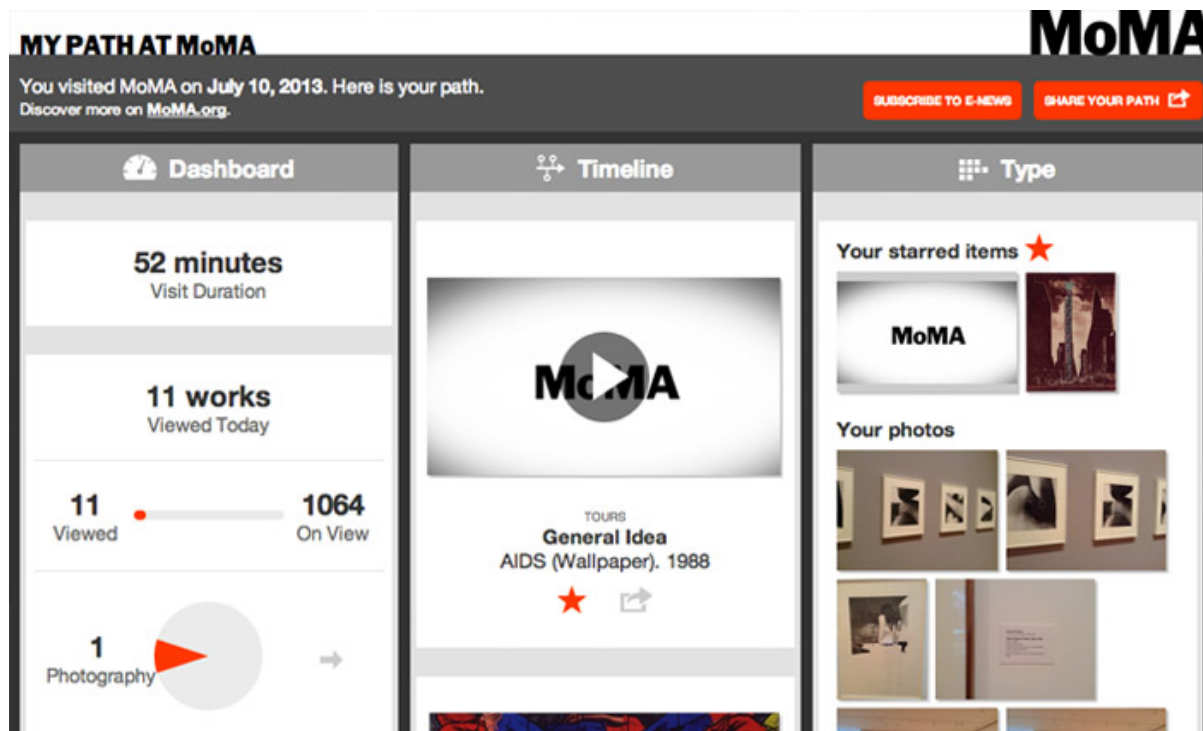


Screens on the Audio+ guide: menu options, audio content page, and search screen

One thing I loved about the Audio+ guide was the built in camera. Not having to juggle my own camera along with the audio guide was a relief and it was an easy way to ensure that content would be available for me to really explore on my own time, outside of the museum. Throughout my visit I used the guide to take photos and add stars to the pieces I liked, but unless the piece was part of an official tour (i.e. I didn't have to search by artist/title), I was not compelled to look up any extended info. Call me lazy,

but going through the search process was too much effort for the return. After about an hour I returned the guide and realized it was lucky I arrived when I had; by 11.50 am they were completely out of mobile guides and there was still a line of people waiting.

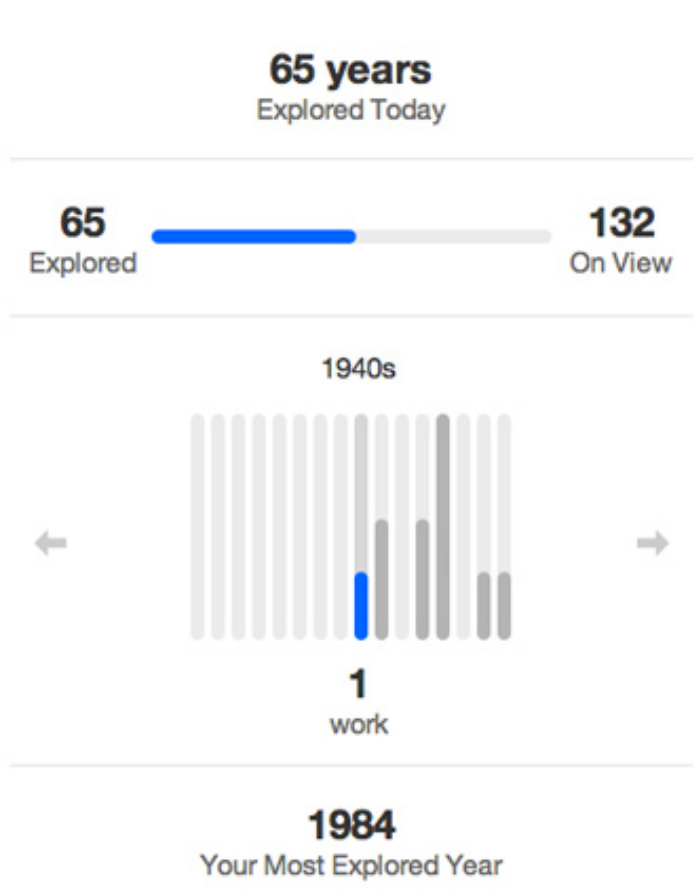
Post visit, I was emailed a link to [My Path at MoMA](http://www.moma.org/path/3EA28207-11C1-43C2-9E51-2C58C710C09D); it is elegantly designed and responsive to screen size so is just as comfortable to view on a mobile device as it is on the desktop.



http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/MyPath_main.jpg

Screen capture of My Path at MoMA

In My Path there are three different categories, **Dashboard**, **Timeline**, and **Type**. Dashboard gives a handful of metrics about the visit — duration (52 mins), works viewed (11 out of 1064), artists viewed (14 out of 590), and years explored (65 out of 132). My first thought: “What?! I saw more than 11 works!” I like what Dashboard tells me, but it is an incomplete story and I want to know more. Now that I’m back at my desk and I’ve [walked through about ten doorways](http://news.nd.edu/news/27476-walking-through-doorways-causes-forgetting-new-research-shows/), my memory is fuzzy. What are these 11 works that I allegedly viewed and how is the guide determining what I did or did not see? 1984 is supposedly my Most Explored Year, well, what was it I saw from 1984?



[http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/up-](http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/years.jpg)

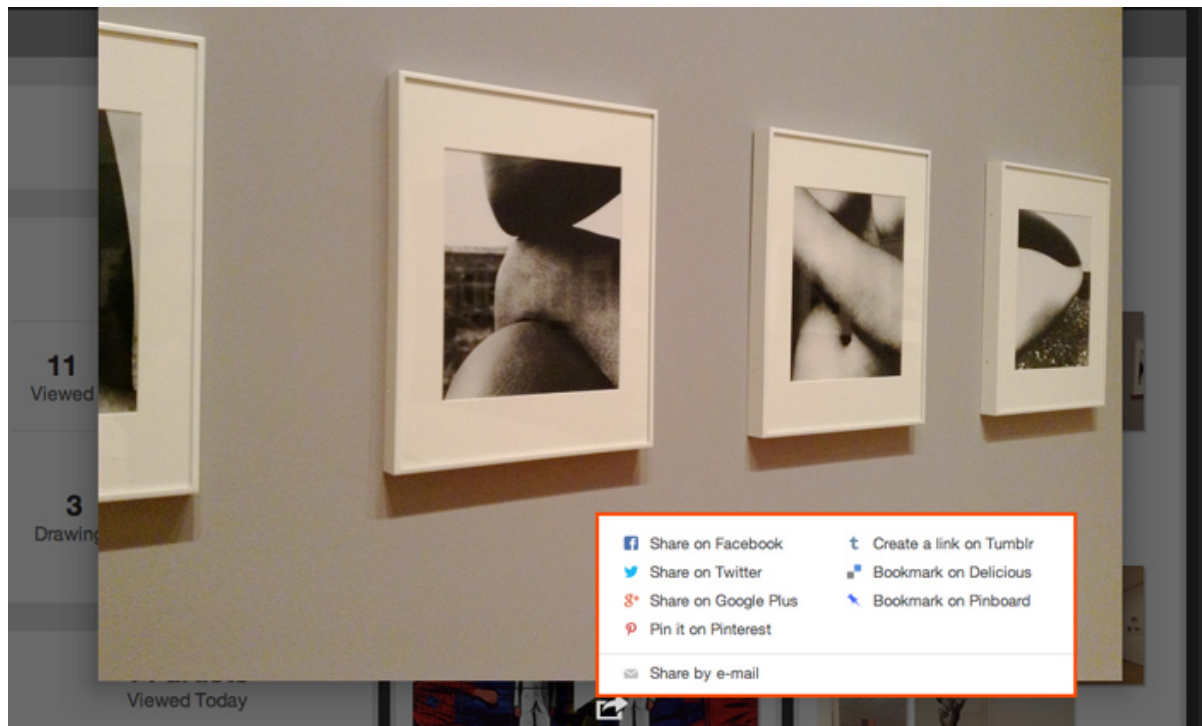
[loads/2013/07/years.jpg](#)

Screen capture of the years explored section of My Path

The Timeline and Type sections show the stuff I did within the guide: audio listened to, photos taken, and items searched for. Same content in each section, just sorted differently. It's really great to see, and excellent to have it all on one place. **However, this is where I think there is a big opportunity lost from an interaction design perspective.** I can play the audio tours in the My Path interface, but the links do not take me to the MoMA website where I can get more information about the artists, related works, etc. Basically, all of the functionality in the Audio+ mobile guide that made it easy to contextualize and relate individual works within a greater context is lost when I am back at my desk and most able to use it. I prefer to have more content and connections available when I'm at home processing my visit (and have a full sized monitor to use), but the Audio+ experience gives you the most content when you are on site (and looking at a tiny screen) and takes it away when you leave.

There are some errors with the My Path interface and I assume that some of these are tweaks being worked out. For example, when I open a photo, the sharing options are convenient, but

they don't include an option for downloading the original. Even the email link, which I expect will email me the photo, just sends a link to My Path. This again brings me to the point that with something like this, users shouldn't have to think.



http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/photo_share.jpg

Screen capture of the photo share options in My Path

Beyond my gripes, let me say that overall my experience with the Audio+ was a strong positive. I generally hate using audio guides (because they are generally boring and clunky) but kudos to the folks behind the Audio+ because this first iteration is fun to use and provides delightful content above and beyond what I am used to. There is huge potential both with the guide and with the post-visit interface and I look forward to giving it another go in a few months once they have had a chance to work out the bumps.

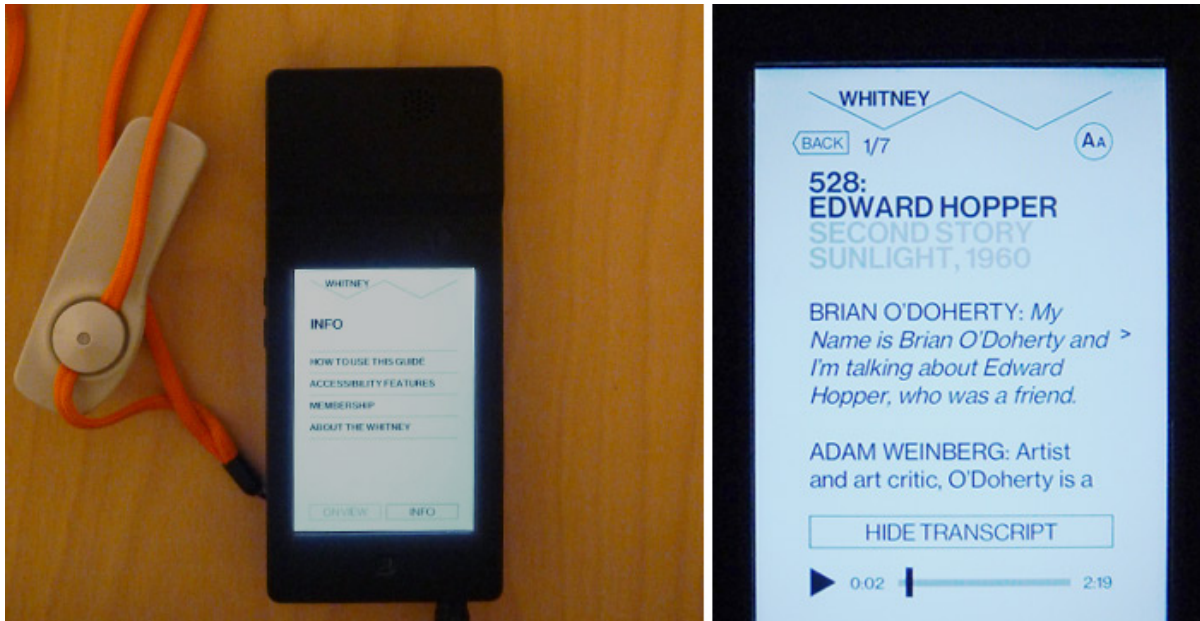
This entry was posted in CH 3.0 <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/ch-3-0/>, *Interaction Design* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/interaction-design/>, *UX* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/ux/> *on August 23, 2013* [<http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/interns-react-to-momas-audio/>] *by raehe* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/raehena/>.

Interns React to...the Whitney's Audio Guide

I spent my summer as an intern in the Digital and Emerging Media department here at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum. Next week, I head home to San Francisco where I will return to the graduate program in design at California College of the Arts. One of my projects this summer has been to visit museums, observe how visitors are using their devices (cell phones, iPads, etc), and to examine audio guides through the lens of an interaction designer.

When I went to check out [MoMA's new mobile guide](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/interns-react-to-momas-audio/) http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/interns-react-to-momas-audio/, Audio+, it was the beginning of my stint at the Cooper-Hewitt, I had never before done a museum audio tour with an iPod touch, and my expectations were lofty. Now that I have spent a summer in Museum World, my perspective and my expectations have changed so I wanted to repeat the exercise of going to a museum and critiquing an audio guide experience.

Last Sunday I spent my afternoon at the Whitney. I arrived at the museum around 1pm. No wait for the audio guide, just walked up and handed over my ID in exchange. Like many other museums, the Whitney uses encased iPods for their audio guides. I was a bit surprised, however, to notice that the battery charge on my guide was around 40%. This turned out not to be a problem for me, but I did overhear other guests complaining that their guides had run out of batteries part way through the visit.



http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/whitney_audioguide.jpg

Two different views of the Whitney's audio guide

The Whitney's audio guide interface is simple and straight forward. All of the guide's navigation is text based, and this digital affordance reinforced the fact that the guide does not offer endless paths and options. After just one or two minutes of clicking around the app, there was no more mystery. The minimalist design helped me to immediately understand what I was going to do with the device and it was easier for me to focus attention on what was on the walls rather than what was on the screen.

I was, and still am, pretty taken with the quality of content available on the Whitney's guide. From what I could tell, in each room of each gallery there is audio content for at least two pieces. It may not sound like a lot, but it ended up being more than enough for me. The consistency of content allowed and encouraged me to use the guide throughout my visit and I was surprised to see how many visitors were using the audio guides – and not just tourists, but locals too.

According to [Audio Guide stop 501](http://whitney.org/WatchAndListen/AudioGuides?play_id=742), Oscar Bluemner once wrote, "Listen to my work as you listen to music...try to feel." The Whitney's audio guide embraces this idea by playing mood setting sounds and music to complement their audio descriptions.

501 AUDIO GUIDE STOP FOR OSCAR BLUEMNER, SITUATION IN YELLOW, 1933

00:22 / 01:25



Oscar Bluemner, *A Situation in Yellow*, 1933 67.66

DOWNLOAD

TRANSCRIPT

Audioguide, Artist, Exhibition, Work

http://whitney.org/WatchAndListen/AudioGuides?play_id=742

Situation in Yellow on the Whitney's web player

One of my favorites is the description of Burchfield's Chicket and Chorus in the Arbor, which you can listen to [here](http://whitney.org/WatchAndListen/AudioGuides?play_id=830) http://whitney.org/WatchAndListen/AudioGuides?play_id=830 . With crickets chirping in the background, it's much easier to put yourself into the world described (late summer, thick trees and bushes, crickets, sunset). The first time I came across one of the audio guide stops with background music I was surprised and delighted. It was a subtle gesture, but one that really elevated the content and did wonders for putting me in the mood, so to speak.

Compared to its counterpart at MoMA, the Audio+, this guide has less content and that was clear from the start. Less content may sound like one point for the "con" list, but I do not think it is always a bad thing. Yes, there were a few times when I missed being able to look up more info about the artist and see related works, but not having the op-

tion at all definitely made me more focussed on the art in front of me. In the case of the Whitney, the content is good enough that the “less is more” approach is working well. Plus, all of their audio content is available [online](http://whitney.org/WatchAndListen/AudioGuides) <http://whitney.org/WatchAndListen/AudioGuides> , so when I am back at my desk, I can browse through and re-listen or learn more about the clips I found particularly interesting.



http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/whitney_visitor.jpg

A Whitney visitor using the audio guide

In both the guide for the Whitney and the guide for the MoMA the museum’s own style is reflected. The [MoMA states](http://www.moma.org/about/index) <http://www.moma.org/about/index> that their “mission is helping you understand and enjoy the art of our time” where as the [Whitney is](http://whitney.org/About) <http://whitney.org/About> “dedicated to collecting, preserving, interpreting, and exhibiting American art.” It makes sense, then, that the MoMA (focussed on education) includes much more educational content in their mobile guide and that the Whitney does.

From what I’ve learned this summer (through working with the labs team and through visits to other museums), I know that the visitor experience at home is just as important

as the visitor experience in the museum. For myself, I liked the Whitney guide so much because I didn't feel compelled to do an incredibly deep dive on a mobile device when I should be focussing my attention on what is in front of me. However, where was my at home experience? Once I left the museum, I had nothing to take with me that would prompt me to visit their website and learn more about what I saw. I would love to follow up the great audio guide experience with a great at home experience in the vein of what MoMA is doing with the option to take your visit home. There is opportunity here and I hope the Whitney has plans to fill it.

This entry was posted in CH 3.0 <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/ch-3-0/>, *Interaction Design* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/interaction-design/>, *UX* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/ux/> *on August 23, 2013* [<http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/interns-react-to-the-whitneys-audio-guide/>] *by raeheana* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/raehena/>.

Three adventures in universal design, or, what does a veggie peeler have in common with a museum? (0/3)



http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/OXOHandPeeler-CourtesyPRweb.com_.jpg

Though designed specifically for the arthritic, this product “appeals” to everyone.

“The way to think about ‘everybody’ is not to think about the average person in the middle, but to think about the extremes. Think about people at the edges of your potential buying public and think about people who are most challenged.”

[Dan Formosa interviewed by Debbie Millman in [Brand Thinking](http://www.amazon.com/Brand-Thinking-Other-Noble-Pursuits/dp/1581158645?tag=viglink12317-20) <http://www.amazon.com/Brand-Thinking-Other-Noble-Pursuits/dp/1581158645?tag=viglink12317-20>]

If you hang out at a design museum long enough, you start to pick up on certain recurring concepts. One good recurring concept has to do with a thing called *universal design*:

The term “universal design” was coined by the architect [Ronald L. Mace](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ronald_L._Mace&action=edit&redlink=1) to describe the concept of designing all products and the built environment to be aesthetic and usable to the greatest extent possible by everyone, regardless of their age, ability, or status in life.
[Wikipedia]

So what’s the lesson behind universal design? Pretend you’re a bossman trying to cut costs wherever possible. For you, universal design might seem like a non-critical endeavor. Sure, it would be nice for the disabled and the elderly to have easy access to all aspects of your [insert product being designed here], but you don’t have room in the budget for anything elaborate. “We’ll tackle accessibility if we have leftover funds at the end of the project,” you’d say. Or “after we design the bulk of our [widget], then we’ll start work on the accessibility stuff because it’s required by law.”

If you were to study your design history, however, you’d realize that this view could limit your opportunities for innovation and crowd-pleasing design.



http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/798px-Drano_Lake_accessible_fishing_platform_signage.jpg

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 required organizations and institutions to make buildings, public transportation, signage, and more accessible to everyone. Image by USFWS Pacific.

The amazing truth of universal design is that when a design team focuses on “edge users,” or “extreme users,” it very often leads to unexpected insights, which can then lead to innovative features that benefit *all* users. When you design for the edges, everybody benefits.

The OXO Good Grips <http://smartdesignworldwide.com/work/oxo-good-grips/> line is one of the most commonly cited examples of this phenomenon. The **Smart Design** <http://smartdesignworldwide.com/> team sat down to design a line of veggie peelers, can openers and scissors for people with arthritis and limited hand mobility. After the chunky, ergonomically superior new products hit the market, they became a *huge* mainstream success.



http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Segway_tour_DC_02_2010_9177.jpg

Segway scooter riders enjoy the benefits of curb cut sidewalks. Photo by Mariordo Mario Roberto Duran Ortiz

Another example are [Selwyn Goldsmith](http://www.theguardian.com/society/2011/may/31/selwyn-goldsmith-obituary) <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2011/may/31/selwyn-goldsmith-obituary> 's "curb cuts." The mini-ramps we see now on most city street corners were designed primarily with wheelchair users in mind. After they were implemented, it became obvious that this ergonomic consideration benefitted not only wheelchair users, but also luggage-toters, stroller-pushers, stiletto-wearers, cyclists and anybody who enjoys a bit of added ease and comfort in getting around.

With all this in mind, our summer intern (*psst—[applications for next year](http://www.cooperhewitt.org/internships/peter-krueger-summer-internship-program-2013)* <http://www.cooperhewitt.org/internships/peter-krueger-summer-internship-program-2013> *are open!*) [Rachel Sakai](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/raehana/) <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/raehana/> and I set out to do some research. We have a very small part in the über-mega-process that is the [Cooper Hewitt gallery re-design](http://www.cooperhewitt.org/redesign) <http://www.cooperhewitt.org/redesign>, and we wanted to take on a summer project that could enrich that work.

We decided to focus in on a blind person's museum experience. How might an understanding of a blind visitor's experience inform and enhance the design decisions being made in our re-

design project?

We chose to embrace a mindset of [Human Centered Design](http://plusacumen.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Week1_readings.pdf) http://plusacumen.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Week1_readings.pdf. (Note that Human Centered Design is not the same thing as universal design). I've helped to create lots of Museum content—videos, exhibitions, books—on the topic of Human Centered Design. After so much experience intellectualizing about the technique, I was pretty eager to find a way to try it myself.

Human-Centered Design (HCD) is a process and a set of techniques used to create new solutions for the world....The reason this process is called "human-centered" is because it starts with the people we are designing for. The HCD process begins by examining the needs, dreams, and behaviors of the people we want to affect with our solutions.

[From IDEO's [HCD ToolKit](http://www.ideo.com/work/human-centered-design-toolkit/) http://www.ideo.com/work/human-centered-design-toolkit/]



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/method-cards2.jpg>

Our 3 chosen IDEO method cards: Empathy Tools, Competitive Product Survey, and Shadowing

We borrowed a set of [IDEO method cards](http://www.ideo.com/work/method-cards/) from [Cara](http://www.cooper-hewitt.org/conversations/2013/05/01/meet-staff-cara-mccarty) and chose three that served our goal to better understand the blind museum visitor's experience. In the next three posts, we'll explain how we applied the methods of Empathy tools, Competitive Product Survey, and Shadowing:

1. Empathy Tools: Go on a blindfolded museum visit <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/three-adventures-a-blindfolded-visit-to-the-guggenheim-13/>

2. Competitive Product Survey: Take a museum tour designed for the blind <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/three-adventures-the-science-sense-tour-at-american-museum-of-natural-history-23/> •

3. Shadowing: Observe a blind person's museum visit <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/three-adventures-shadowing-a-visit-to-the-metropolitan-museum-of-art-33/> •

This entry was posted in CH 3.0 <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/ch-3-0/>, *Meta Issues* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/meta-issues/>, *UX* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/ux/> and tagged *HCD* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/tag/hcd/>, *UX* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/tag/ux/> on August 28, 2013 [<http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/three-adventures-in-universal-design-or-what-does-a-veggie-peeler-have-in-common-with-a-museum-03/>] by *katieshelly* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/katieshelly/> •

Three adventures: a blindfolded visit to the Guggenheim (1/3)

This is the first in a series of three “adventures in universal design,” a design research experiment carried out by Rachel Sakai and Katie Shelly. For an introduction to the project, see our earlier post, [here](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/three-adventures-in-universal-design-or-what-does-a-veggie-peeler-have-in-common-with-a-muse-um-03/)

um-03/ •



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/RamonTurent.jpg>

The Guggenheim Museum, which is just a stone's throw away from our office. Photo by Flickr user Ramón Torent.

EMPATHY TOOLS:

BLINDFOLDED VISIT TO THE GUGGENHEIM

AUGUST 5 2013

Taking a cue from [Patricia Moore's empathy research](http://www.cca.edu/news/2010/patricia-moore-universal-designer-undercover) <http://www.cca.edu/news/2010/patricia-moore-universal-designer-undercover> in NYC in the 1990s, Katie and I began our research with an empathy-building

field trip to the Guggenheim. I took on the role of the blind visitor and Katie played the part of my sighted companion. The entire trip lasted for about 45 minutes and I kept my eyes shut for the duration.

Even though the Guggenheim is just a block away from our office, this was my first visit so I had no pre-existing mental map of the space. With my eyes closed, it did not take long before I felt completely disoriented, vulnerable, and dependent on my companion. After five minutes I had no idea where I was or where we were going; it felt like we were walking in circles (actually, we may have been because of the Guggenheim spiral...). I trust Katie, but this was unnerving.

(Note: this intensity of discomfort would not apply for a “real” blind or partially-sighted person, who would be entirely familiar with the experience of walking around without sight. A mild feeling of disorientation in the space, though, is still worth noting. Maybe the level of discomfort for a blind person would be more subtle, more like how a sighted person would feel wandering around without a map.)



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/mrShivTurrell.jpg>

The James Turrell exhibition at the Guggenheim. Photo by Flickr user Mr Shiv.

We started the visit on our own with Katie guiding me and doing her best to describe the

space, the other visitors, and the art. After a few minutes, we found one of the Guggenheim's Gallery Guides wearing a large "Ask Me About the Art" button. When Katie asked the guide whether she was trained to describe art to low-vision guests, her response, "...I had one training on that," was hesitant. To my ear, it sounded like reluctance and I immediately felt as though our request was a bother. Katie also felt like a pest, like she was "drilling the attendant" on her training. After some initial awkwardness, though, she offered to just share what she usually says about the piece (James Turrell's *Prado (White)*), which turned out to be a very interesting bit of interpretation. We thanked her for the info and moved on.

By the second half of our visit we had picked up a couple of audioguides. The Guggenheim, like many other museums, has the encased iPod touch flavor of audio guide. The look and feel is nice and slick, but it's not great for accessibility because the home button is blocked. (A triple-tap of this button is how you open accessibility controls in iOS).

Dependence on the [GUI](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graphical_user_interface) meant that when I wanted to hear a description, Katie would take my audioguide, start it playing, hand it back to me, then start up her own audioguide. If I missed a word and needed to go back, or if I wanted to pause for a second, well, I was pretty much out of luck. I could have asked Katie, but I felt like too much of a bother, so just I let it go.

The audio content was interesting, but it was written with sighted visitors in mind, with very little visual description of the work being discussed.

There was a big chunk of text on the wall explaining a bit about James Turrell's work, which Katie read aloud to me. It would have been great to just have that text available for playback in the audioguide.

After our visit, I dug deeper into the Guggenheim's website and learned that they have a free app that includes verbal imaging description tours written for visitors who are blind. Some of these tours have associated "touch object packs" that can be picked up from staff. That would have been great, but at the time of our trip Katie and I were unaware that these options existed, even though we did check out the Guggenheim website before visiting. None of the staff (who could see that I appeared to be blind) reached out to let us know about these great accessibility options. What a shame!

On the afternoon we visited, the Guggenheim was packed. We didn't want to be too much of a nuisance to the already-busy staff so Katie went into "hacker mode," looking for ways to tweak

the experience to fit our needs. The visit became about **hunting for things we could share.**



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/headphonesplitter.jpg>

A headphone splitter lets two people listen to the same device.

Takeaways

- **A simple hack idea: headphone splitters.** Though it wouldn't give blind visitors more control over their audio guide, it would take away the clumsiness of one person having to manage two audioguides. Plus, whether you are blind or not, using a headphone splitter is fun and can

strengthen a shared experience.

- I was disoriented throughout the trip and this was very uncomfortable. A better understanding of how I was moving through the space would have helped. **How might we orient blind visitors when they first enter the museum so that they have a broad mental map of the space?**

- I was dependent on Katie and did not have many options for how I might want to experience the museum (deep engagement with a few works, shallow engagement with many works, explore independently, explore with a friend, etc). **How might we provide blind visitors with options for different types of experiences?**

- Katie did her best to “hack” the experience and tried to discover things we could share in order to create a meaningful museum visit for both of us. **How might we help create and shape shared experiences for pairs who visit the museum?**

- **Staff training is important.** The Museum has great accessibility tools, but they were invisible to us because nobody on staff mentioned them. The front desk person didn't ask whether we would be interested in the accessibility tools, even though she had seen that I appeared to be blind.

- **Staff mood is important.** Many of the staff we interacted with seemed bashful or embarrassed about the situation and our accessibility questions. The museum was hectic and they were very busy; we felt like asking for too much help would have been pesky.

Check out our next adventure in universal design, a [museum tour designed for the blind](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/three-adventures-the-science-sense-tour-at-american-museum-of-natural-history-23/) <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/three-adventures-the-science-sense-tour-at-american-museum-of-natural-history-23/>.

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Three adventures: the Science Sense tour at American Museum of Natural History (2/3)

This is the second in a series of three “adventures in universal design,” a design research experiment carried out by Rachel Sakai and Katie Shelly. For an introduction to the project, see our earlier post,

[here](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/three-adventures-in-universal-design-or-what-does-a-veggie-peeler-have-in-common-with-a-muse-um-03/) [http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/three-adventures-in-universal-design-or-what-does-a-veggie-peeler-have-in-common-with-a-muse-](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/three-adventures-in-universal-design-or-what-does-a-veggie-peeler-have-in-common-with-a-muse-um-03/)

um-03/.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/vagueonthehow.jpg>

The American Museum of Natural History. Photo by Flickr user vagueonthehow.

COMPETITIVE PRODUCT SURVEY:

SCIENCE SENSE TOUR AT AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

AUGUST 15 2013

About once a month, AMNH offers a special tour for the blind, a program called [Science Sense](http://www.amnh.org/plan-your-visit/accessibility/blind-or-partially-sighted). Many museums in New York City have similar monthly tours for the blind. (The Jewish Museum's [Touch Tours](http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/TouchVerbalImaging), The Whitney Museum's [Touch Tours](http://whitney.org/Education/Access), MoMA's [Art inSight](http://www.moma.org/learn/disabilities/sight), the Met Museum's [Picture This! Workshop](http://www.metmuseum.org/events/programs/programs-for-visitors-with-disabilities/visitors-who-are-blind-or-partially-sighted), and many more).

We chose to go on *Science Sense* because it worked with our schedule. Our tour was in the iconic Hall of North American Mammals.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Screen-Shot-2013-08-28-at-11.01.04-AM.png>

The AMNH website's info page about access for the blind and partially sighted

Here are some highlights and observations from our tour:

- We gathered in the lobby of the planetarium. The tour's organizer, Jess, explained that the tour meets in the planetarium entrance and not the main NMAH entrance because it is a more accessible entrance. (Ramp, no stairs, large doorways with push-button opening, etc)
- It was a summer Thursday at 2:30, so we were a small group. Many of our fellow tour-goers

appeared to be about retirement-age, which makes sense given the time of day. There was one teenaged boy, who was with his mom who has partial vision.

- The group had a chatty and friendly vibe. About 10 guests total. People were chatting with each other and having getting-to-know-you type conversations during our walk to the Hall of Mammals.

- Only 2 out of the 10 attendees appeared to be blind or low-vision. Each of the blind/low-vision guests had a sighted companion with them. The other 6 attendees appeared to be fully sighted.

- Irene, our tour guide, wore a small amplifier around her waist and a head-mounted microphone (something like [this](http://www.ampli.com/portable-pa-system/206-BeltBlaster.aspx) <http://www.ampli.com/portable-pa-system/206-BeltBlaster.aspx>). The hall wasn't terribly loud, but the amplifier made for more comfortable listening (and probably more comfortable speaking, too).



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Tour-of-AMNH-12.jpg>

Our guide Irene describing the bison diorama for the group.

- Once we arrived in the darkened Hall, Irene began our tour the same way most tours begin: an explanation of historical context. (When and why the dioramas were originally created, when and why they were restored... etc.)

– Irene described the first diorama thoroughly, element by element. (Backdrop, foreground elements, taxidermy animals.) One guest asked about how big the diorama is. Good question. Irene suggested that a second guide take the blind guests for a walk from one edge of the diorama to the other to get a sense of scale. This was a suggestion I wouldn't have thought of; seems more fun than just stating a measurement.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Tour-of-AMNH-22.jpg>

Irene delights in sharing the touch sample (bison fur) with the group.

– Irene had a number of touch samples on a rolling cart. Some plastic animal skulls and a sample swatch of bison fur. At the end of our time in front of the bison diorama, she gave everyone a chance to feel the musky, matted fur.

– Naturally, as Irene was explaining the diorama and the touch samples were sitting behind her on the cart, many other visitors to the Hall (not part of the tour) took the opportunity to touch the fun stuff as it sat unattended on the cart.

– We went around to four more stunning dioramas, where Irene and a second guide (who was in training) took turns describing and contextualizing the displays.

– I noticed that sometimes the sighted companion of one of the attendees would quietly add on his own description to what the tour guide was saying. Once I saw him lift his blind partner's arm, and sweep it through the space to explain where different objects in the diorama were positioned. (We would later chat with these folks, Linda & Dave, who ended up going on a trip with us to the Met, which we'll talk about in the next section.)

Takeaways:

– Rachel & I both happen to be big radio/podcast listeners. During the tour, I realized that a blind person's experience is a lot like listening to radio. They are relying only on the guide's words to "see" what's there.

What if museum tour guides were trained to think and speak like radio hosts? What if each stop on the tour opened with a detailed, theatrically delivered, visual description? Listening to a luscious, mood-setting, masterfully crafted description of anything on display— be it a Bison diorama or a Dyson Vacuum Cleaner or a Van Gogh painting would be **a delight for sighted and blind visitors alike.**



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/up->

[loads/2013/08/1024px-Ira_Glass_CMU_2006.jpg](loads/2013/08/1024px-Ira_Glass_CMU_2006.jpg)

What if your tour guide could describe works as viscerally and virtuosically as Ira Glass could?

-There was some confusion about the basic size and shape of the dioramas. **What if there was a tiny model of each diorama that visitors could feel?** Blind visitors could understand scale and shape right away, and sighted visitors might enjoy a touchable model, too. Imagine touchable mini-models of paintings, sculptures, and other museum stuff, too.

Check out our third and last adventure in universal design research, observing a [blind person's museum visit](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/three-adventures-shadowing-a-visit-to-the-metropolitan-museum-of-art-33/) <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/three-adventures-shadowing-a-visit-to-the-metropolitan-museum-of-art-33/> .

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Three adventures: shadowing a visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art (3/3)

This is the third in a series of three “adventures in universal design,” a design research experiment carried out by Rachel Sakai and Katie Shelly. For an introduction to the project, see our earlier post,

[here](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/three-adventures-in-universal-design-or-what-does-a-veggie-peeler-have-in-common-with-a-muse-um-03/) [http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/three-adventures-in-universal-design-or-what-does-a-veggie-peeler-have-in-common-with-a-muse-](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/three-adventures-in-universal-design-or-what-does-a-veggie-peeler-have-in-common-with-a-muse-um-03/)

[um-03/](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/three-adventures-in-universal-design-or-what-does-a-veggie-peeler-have-in-common-with-a-muse-um-03/) .

SHADOWING:

OBSERVE LINDA & DAVE AS THEY VISIT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

AUGUST 22 2013

On the *Science Sense* tour, we met a wonderfully friendly and warm husband and wife duo named Linda & Dave. We asked if they'd be interested in volunteering for some more research by allowing us to shadow them at any museum they chose.

They agreed, and a week later, off we went. Linda is blind and Dave is sighted. They love museums, and they have visited many around the world, together.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/linda-dave-in-front-of-met.jpg>

Linda & Dave in front of the Met Museum

Here's a play-by-play of their visit:

-As we entered the crowded lobby, I noticed that Dave firmly placed his hand near the back of Linda's neck to guide her—it was so crowded and loud, he had to use firm physical contact to help her navigate the security bag check and chaotic lobby. Linda also used her rolling cane in her left hand.

-Once we got inside, the first thing they did was go to the information desk and ask how to find the exhibition they wanted to see—*Brush Writing in the Arts of Japan* <http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2013/brush-writing>. The desk person indicated the location on a paper map. L & D didn't use the map; instead they listened and remembered the attendant's verbal instructions (left at the arch, elevator to floor 3, make a left, etc).

-Linda carried a paper flyer in her purse with a list of special exhibitions on it, and she brought it out when talking to the attendant, saying "yes, we want to see the one on this list." Interesting that though she herself could not see what was on the paper, she knew what it said (ostensibly because Dave had told her earlier) and she kept it in her hand, so she could use it later when conversing with others.

-On the way to the elevator, we walked past a table with audioguides, L&D did not notice it.

-At the top of the elevator, we saw an Information Desk with an attendant. Dave expressed excitement that they have Info Desks throughout the Met, saying "before they had these things, I would just wander around this place getting lost!"

-L&D approached the satellite info desk, and asked about the audioguide— does it include the *Japanese Brush Writing* exhibition? The attendant explained that the audioguide covers the whole museum. Audioguides are not being given out from this desk, though. L&D did not get an audioguide.

-We walk down a hall full of artifacts toward the *Japanese Brush Writing* show. Dave went into "concise tour guide mode" just to give Linda a sense of the scenery, simply naming a few of the objects we went past: "Perfume bottles." "Ceramic horses."

-We found our destination: a dimly lit gallery. Linda asked, "is it all paintings?" And Dave explained that no, the gallery had a combination of statues, ceramics, and scrolls. They were pleased that there was a variety of objects and it wasn't all flat work.

-L&D approached the standing warrior statue at the entrance of the show. Dave began with a visual description of the statue— materials, colors, posture. When talking about the statue's long earlobes, he lightly tugged Linda's earlobes. When talking about the statue's tufty hair, he lightly touched the crown of Linda's head— anything to make the experience more than just standing and listening. After his thorough description, he read the object label aloud.

-They were very methodical. This is what they did in front of each object they looked at:

- 1) Dave gave a purely visual description. Colors, size, subject matter, mood.
- 2) Maybe a few clarifying questions from Linda ("Are the lines roundish or squarish?" "Are the lines harsh?" "Are the people done finely?")
- 3) Dave read the object label aloud, sometimes omitting a bit of info, sometimes reading it all right down to the donor details.
- 4) A bit of back-and-forth, sharing their reactions to the piece, making a connection to prior knowledge or experiences, or simply expressing how pretty and/or interesting they find it.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/F1604FE6-1CD7-4C95-B4E9-8E90D527B810.jpg>

In front of this artwork, Dave guided Linda's hand through the air to help explain the size and composition. (It looks a bit like she is touching the artwork because of the angle of this photo, but we assure you that she is not).

-Dave often would take Linda's hand in his, hold it outstretched, and wave it around to delineate shapes and spatial relationships ("there are mountains here, and a waterfall right here...")

-A few of the Buddha statues were doing *mudras* <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mudra> with their hands. Dave would put Linda's arms and hands into the same position, mimicking the statue. Sometimes he'd join her in the pose, so they'd both be frozen, holding the pose for a moment of contemplation. (Extremely adorable.) I don't think many sighted visitors would think to do this, but it looked like they were having fun, and perhaps gave them a bit of "somatic insight" into how that statue might be feeling.

-As Linda got more details about the piece in front of her, she would exclaim surprise, "oh!" "oo-oo!" As if she was building an image in her imagination, and each new bit of info from Dave was like an exciting clue in an unsolved mystery.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/772D5631-C614-46EF-B235-63CF76A5B305.jpg>

Dave puts Linda's arms into the same position as the statue.

-I noticed that sometimes Linda would touch the glass in front of an object. Just to get some sense of space and anchoring, I'd guess.

-About halfway through the exhibition, Dave took a break to sit down on a bench. Linda, Rachel and I took the chance to chat a bit. Linda commented that she would like to get a sense of scale and mood upon entering a museum. A sighted visitor gets a whole bunch of scene-setting information right upon entering with a sweep of the eye, and can choose what piece they want to check out. For her, however, she's generally subject to Dave's decisions about what to look at when they tour an exhibition. She said that she doesn't mind this, because she likes Dave's taste, but it is a consideration for any blind visitor.

-From Dave's perspective, it's a lot of talking and mental work. He seemed to be a bit worn out at times when reading aloud those long object labels. No wonder he needed a break!

-Linda also mentioned that they like to go to the gift shop, and that sometimes there are statuettes or replicas of things in the exhibition that you can touch, so that's a good blind person's "hack."



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Linda-checks-the-models.jpg>

Hacking the museum: the gift shop is a good place to find touchable replicas of objects in the collection.

-As we moved on, we neared a fountain. Right away, Linda heard the water trickling and said, "I hear a fountain!" Dave started to describe the fountain, which, as it turned out, is kinda hard to describe in words. There were some children seated on the wooden platform beside the fountain. Linda asked if she could sit down on the platform, which is somewhat bench-like, but sort of ambiguous-looking as to whether you can sit there or not. We said, sure, go for it. One thing led to another.. and soon Linda was feeling the white stones, and then the fountain itself. There was no guard in the area, just a few fellow patrons who seemed touched and tickled, as were we, watching Linda light up as she discovered the different textures and shapes. "Ooooh!" "Ahhh!" "Wowww!!" She was so, so into it. Just totally beaming. Finally, something to touch! Dave turned to us with a wink, and said "See what a difference tactile makes?"



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Noguchi-Fountain.jpg>

The Water Stone, a basalt fountain by Isamu Noguchi. Photo by Flickr user wallyg

-Our last stop was a Japanese Reading Room, where the museum has tea ceremonies and other social events. The room has some Japanese-style floral arrangements, and beautiful wooden furniture by George Nakashima. Linda gave herself a thorough tour of the furniture, feeling the curves, bends, and joints in the massive walnut table and matching chairs. since it was definitely OK to touch. It was really the only moment when Linda could be independent in the museum.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Reading-Room.jpg>

Linda giving herself a tactile tour of the Japanese Reading Room furniture at the Met.

Takeaways

– Linda & Dave had carbon-copy experiences. Many people enjoy visiting a museum with a partner and staying side-by-side the whole time. Sometimes, though, you don't want to visit in that way. Personally, when I'm in a museum, I tend to break off from the group and explore on my own. **How might we allow blind visitors to have the option for an independent experience?**

– Sighted visitors can easily get a sweep of the room immediately upon entering. What looks interesting in this gallery? What's the mood? Where do I want to go first? **How might we afford blind visitors a "sweep of the room" upon entering?**

– Linda pointed this out to us during the tour: **neutral description > coded description**. A neutral (and blind-friendly) description would be, "on the left there is a small, simple building

with a thatched roof and open balcony on all sides.” A coded (and blind-unfriendly) description would be “on the left there is a small building, looks like early Japanese architecture.” Get the difference? A neutral description uses transparent language that requires a minimum amount of previous knowledge. A coded description requires some prior education or knowledge to understand it.

– **Tactile makes a huge difference.** Tactile moments were highlights of the tour: Dave tapping Linda on the head while describing a warrior’s messy hairdo, Dave sweeping her hand around to convey space, folding her hands into a Buddhist *mudra*, Linda tapping the glass in front of her for a spatial anchor, detailedly exploring the furniture in the Reading Room and a covert tickling of the Noguchi fountain. I’d argue that if these literal “touchpoints” were formally afforded to all visitors, all visitors’ experiences would be enhanced, not just experiences of the blind and partially sighted.

– **Quietness of the gallery was on our side.** The gallery was small, only had a few people in it, and was carpeted. Dave and Linda could hear each other without straining their voices or their ears. This made the experience very tranquil and pleasant. Imagine how different their visit would have felt in a noisier, more echoey gallery.

– **We didn’t observe much active use of sound.** L&D didn’t have audioguides, and there was no music or anything like that in the galleries. Linda mentioned various fountains in different museums that she liked. As a sighted person, I have to admit that fountains are not usually a highlight for me, but I think for Linda, because it’s something she can experience directly, they are often a highlight. What if museums with fountains (or any acoustically cool architectural feature) encouraged all visitors to close their eyes and really listen?

– **We didn’t observe any use of tech.** L&D kept this visit analog. Wonder how the visit might have been better/worse/the same with some type of technological aid? How to design such technology to support and enhance rather than distract and annoy?



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/A-Happy-Group.jpg>

Linda, Rachel and Katie at the Met. We had a good time!

This entry was posted in CH 3.0 <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/ch-3-0/> *and tagged HCD* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/tag/hcd/>, *UX* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/tag/ux/> *on August 28, 2013* [<http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/three-adventures-shadowing-a-visit-to-the-metropolitan-museum-of-art-33/>] *by katieshelly* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/katieshelly/>.

Pandas, Press, Planetary

Panda researchers in China wear panda costumes to give mother-like feeling to a lonely baby panda who lost her mother pic.twitter.com/OtUhV2UJTN <http://t.co/OtUhV2UJTN>

— Earth Pics (@PicturesEarth) [August 25, 2013](https://twitter.com/PicturesEarth/status-371769270323396608) <https://twitter.com/PicturesEarth/status-371769270323396608>

It has been a few crazy days since we announced the addition of iPad App, [Planetary](http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/35520989/) <http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/35520989/>, to the museum's collection.

If you haven't yet [read the long essay](https://www.cooperhewitt.org/object-of-the-day/2013/08/26/planetary-collecting-and-preserving-code-living-object) <https://www.cooperhewitt.org/object-of-the-day/2013/08/26/planetary-collecting-and-preserving-code-living-object> about what we've done, then it is squirrelled away on the Museum's Object of the Day blog. The short version is that it is the first time that the museum has acquired code, and that code has also been open sourced as a part of the preservation strategy.

Here's some of the press it has generated so far. We'll spare you the hundreds of tweets!

Smithsonian Magazine – ["How Does a Museum Collect an iPad app for its Collections?"](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/smithsonian-institution/How-Does-a-Museum-Acquire-an-iPad-App-for-its-Collections-220570391.html)

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/smithsonian-institution/How-Does-a-Museum-Acquire-an-iPad-App-for-its-Collections-220570391.html>

The Verge – ["Hello art world: Smithsonian acquires first piece of code for design collection"](http://www.theverge.com/2013/8/27/4663770/smithsonian-acquires-first-piece-of-code-for-design-collection)

Blouin ArtInfo – ["The Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt Museum Redefines Design by Acquiring Its First Code"](http://blogs.artinfo.com/objectlessons/2013/08/28/the-smithsonians-cooper-hewitt-museum-redefines-design-by-acquiring-its-first-code/)

Slate – ["How Does a Design Museum Add Software to Its Collection? There's an App for That."](http://www.slate.com/blogs/future_tense/2013/08/27/cooper_hewitt_planetary_ipad_app_design_museum_acquires_software_for_it-That)

s.html "

cNet – “Bragging rights for iPad app: First code in Smithsonian design museum http://news.cnet.com/8301-10797_3-57600510-235/bragging-rights-for-ipad-app-first-code-in-smithsonian-design-museum/”

Gizmodo – “The Smithsonian Just Added a Chunk of Code to Its Permanent Collection <http://gizmodo.com/the-smithsonian-just-added-a-chunk-of-code-to-its-perma-1214321815>”

Tech Crunch – “Cooper-Hewitt Adds The First Piece Of Code To Its Design Collection <http://techcrunch.com/2013/08/27/cooper-hewitt-adds-the-first-piece-of-code-to-its-design-collection/>”

AllThingsD – “Your iTunes Collection, Displayed as a Solar System <http://allthingsd.com/20130827/your-itunes-collection-displayed-as-a-solar-system/>”

TUAW – “Smithsonian adds iPad app code to its collection <http://www.tuaw.com/2013/08/28/smithsonian-adds-ipad-app-code-to-its-collection/>”

MemeBurn – “Smithsonian acquires first piece of code for design collection <http://memeburn.com/2013/08/smithsonian-acquires-first-piece-of-code-for-design-collection/>”

LA Times – “Planetary, an iPad app, enters collection of Cooper-Hewitt museum <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/culture/la-et-cm-ipad-application-cooper-hewitt-museum-20130828,0,445290.story>”

Hyperallergic – “The First Code Acquired by Smithsonian’s Design Museum is Released to the World <http://hyperallergic.com/81306/the-first-code-acquired-by-smithsonians-design-museum-is-released-to-the-world/>”

Future Insights – “Intergalactic Planetary: Tell us what you think <http://www.futureinsights.com/home/intergalactic-planetary-tell-us-what-you-think.html>”

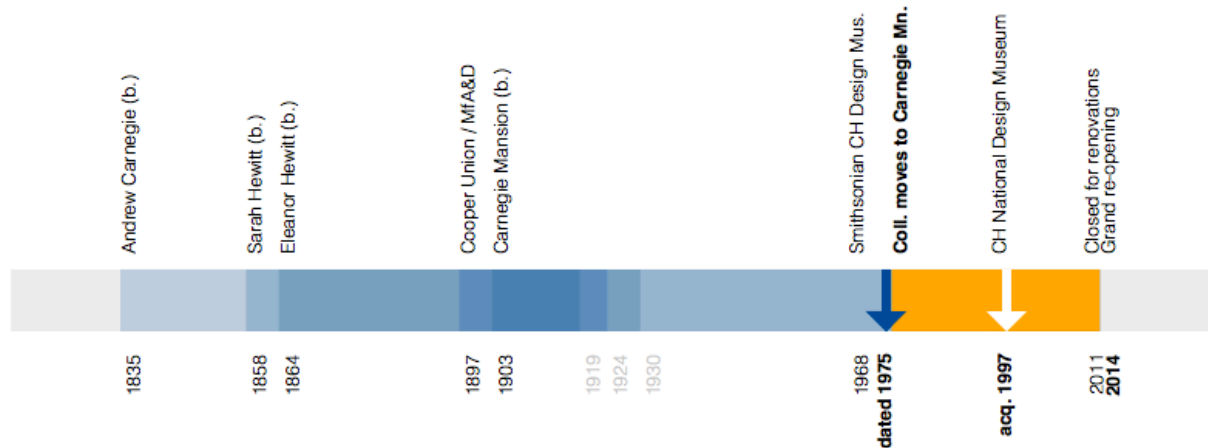
We’re really happy – not least of all because we can confirm that like the Internet, the press also really love pandas.

And also Fast Company – “To Preserve Digital Design, The Smithsonian Begins Collecting Apps <http://www.fastcodesign.com/3016595/to-preserve-digital-design-the-smithsonian-begins-collecting-apps>”

This entry was posted in Meta Issues <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/meta-issues/> on August 29, 2013

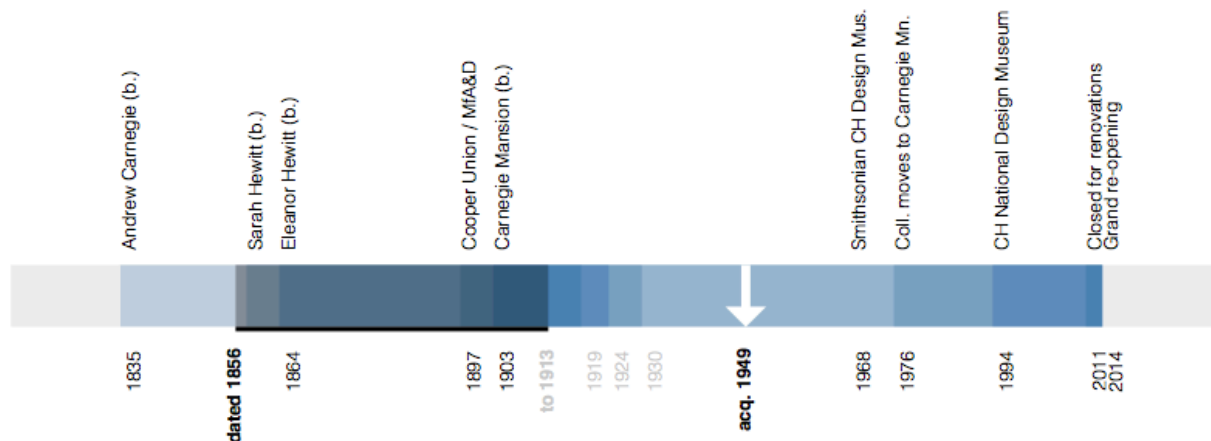
[<http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/pandas-press-planetary/>] *by Seb Chan* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/seb/> .

A Timeline of Event Horizons



We've added a [new experimental feature](http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/experimental/#t1) to the collections website. It's an interactive visualization depicting when an object was produced and when that object was collected using some of the major milestones and individuals involved in the Cooper-Hewitt's history itself as a bracketing device.

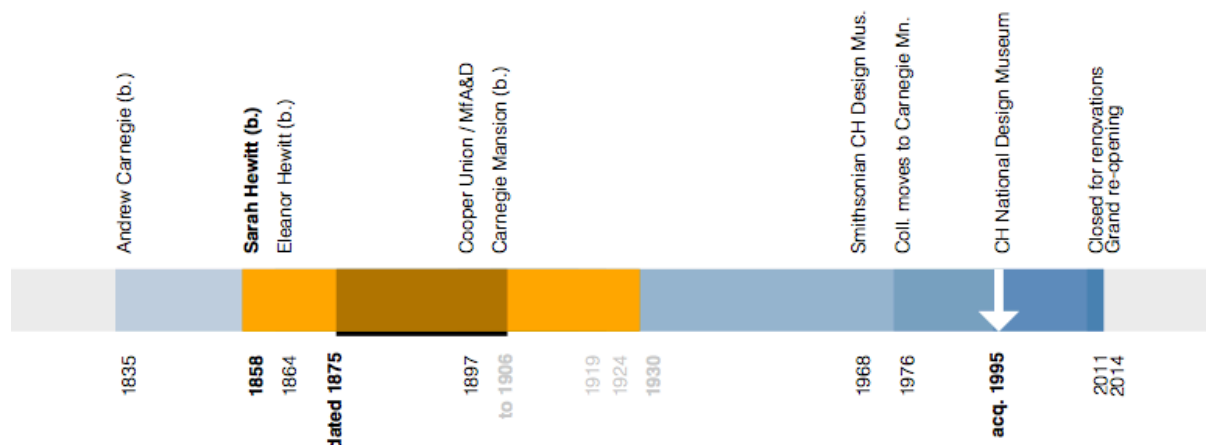
Specifically the years 1835 when Andrew Carnegie was born and 2014 when the museum will re-open after a major renovation to Carnegie's New York City mansion where the collection is now housed. It's not that Andrew Carnegie's birth signals the beginning of time but rather it is the first of a series of events that shape the Cooper-Hewitt as we know it today.



The timeline's goal is to visualize an individual object's history relative to the velocity of major events that define the larger collection.

Many of those events overlap. The lives of Andrew Carnegie and the Hewitt Sisters all overlapped one another and they were all alive during the construction of Carnegie's mansion and the creation of Hewitt Sister's Cooper Union Museum for the Arts of Decoration. The life of the mansion overlaps the Cooper-Hewitt becoming part of the Smithsonian in 1976 and assuming the mantle of the National Design Museum in the mid-1990s.

Wherever possible we show both the start and end dates for an object represented as its own underlined event span. If we only know the start date for an object we indicate that using a blue arrow. The date that the object was acquired by the museum is indicated using a white arrow.



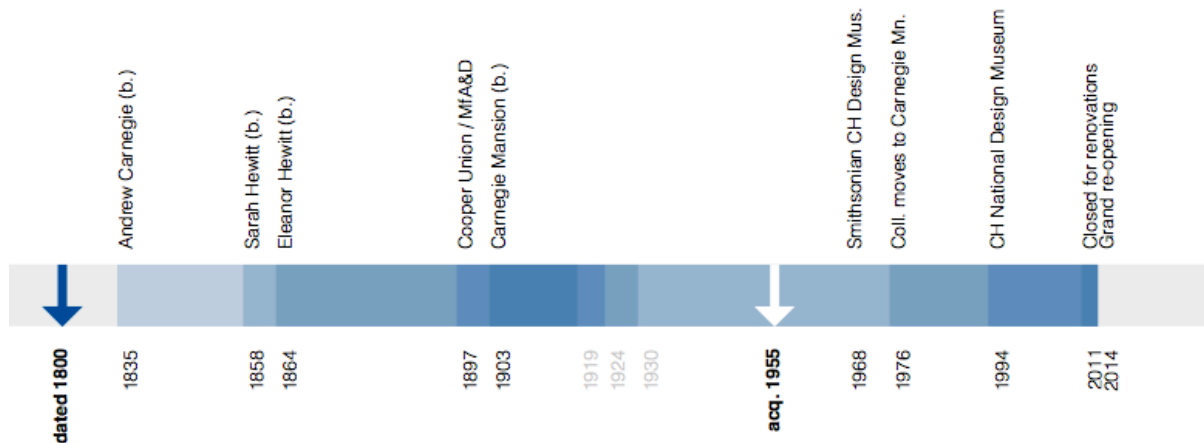
The soundtrack of histories that surround an object are depicted as a series of sequential and semi-transparent blocks layered one atop the other to try and reflect a density of proximate events. If you mouse over the label for an event it is highlighted, in orange, in the overall timeline.

We had three motivations in creating the timeline:

- To continue to develop a visual language to represent the richness and the complexity of our collection. To create views that allows a person to understand the outline of a history and invite further investigation.
- To start understanding the ways in which we need to expose the collection metadata so that it can play nicely with data visualization tools.
- To get our feet wet with the [D3 Javascript library](http://d3js.org) <http://d3js.org> which is currently the (friendly) 800-pound gorilla in the data visualization space. D3 is incredibly powerful but also a bit of a head-scratch to get started with so this is us, getting started.

This is only the first of many more visualizations to come and we are hoping to develop a series of building blocks and methodologies to allow to build more and more experimental features as quickly as we can think of them.

So head over to the [experimental section of the collections website](http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/experimental/#t1) <http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/experimental/#t1> and enable the feature flag for the Object Timeline and have a play and let us know what you think!



We've also made the Github repository for the [underlying Javascript library that powers the timeline](https://github.com/cooperhewitt/d3-timeline-event-horizon) public and released the code under a BSD license. It should be generic enough to work for any dataset that follows a similar pattern to ours and is not specific to a museum collection.

If you look under the hood you might be horrified at what you see. We made a very conscious decision, at this stage of things while we get to know D3, to focus more on the functionality of the timeline itself rather than the elegance of the code. This is a very early experiment and we would be grateful for bug fixes and suggestions for how to make it better.

This entry was posted in CH 3.0 <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/ch-3-0/> *and tagged alpha* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/tag/alpha/> *on September 25, 2013* [\[http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/a-timeline-of-event-horizons/\]](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/a-timeline-of-event-horizons/) *by asc* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/asc/>.

A Kiwi spends three weeks in the Cooper-Hewitt Labs

NEW YORK

*the savage's romance,
accreted where we need the space for commerce—
the center of the wholesale fur trade,
starred with tepees of ermine and peopled with foxes,
the long guard-hairs waving two inches beyond the body of the pelt;
the ground dotted with deer-skins—white with white spots,
“as satin needlework in a single color may carry a varied pattern,”
and wilting eagle's-down compacted by the wind;
and picardels of beaver-skin; white ones alert with snow.
It is a far cry from the “queen full of jewels”
and the beau with the muff,
from the gilt coach shaped like a perfume-bottle,
to the conjunction of the Monongahela and the Allegheny,
and the scholastic philosophy of the wilderness.
It is not the dime-novel exterior,
Niagra Falls, the calico horses and the war-canoe;
it is not that “if the fur is not finer than such as one sees others wear,
one would rather be without it”—
that estimated in raw meat and berries, we could feed the universe;
it is not the atmosphere of ingenuity,
the otter, the beaver, the puma skins
without shooting-irons or dogs;
it is not the plunder,
but “accessibility to experience.”*

Marianne Moore, 'New York' <http://mason.gmu.edu/~stichy/564Moore.html> .

It has been said of New Zealanders that we are a poetry-loving nation, which is one of the

reasons I've chosen a poem to start this blogpost on just a few of the experiences I've had during my time in the Digital & Emerging Media department (aka Labs) here at Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum in New York City.

(The tenses change throughout as a reflection of how this #longread was assembled. They have been preserved to preserve the moments that they were written in).

I'm here on a three-week scholarship in memory of the late Paul Reynolds, a man who loved libraries, museums, art, archives and digital access to them. Like Bill Moggridge, the former director of the Cooper-Hewitt, Paul passed away of cancer before his time. Paul would have been so interested by what this museum is doing.

The award is administered by New Zealand's library and information association, [LIANZA](http://www.lianza.org.nz/Paul_Reynolds_Scholarship) http://www.lianza.org.nz/Paul_Reynolds_Scholarship, and I've also been generously supported by my workplace, the [First World War Centenary Programme Office](http://WW100.govt.nz) <http://WW100.govt.nz> within the Ministry for Culture & Heritage, to take it up.

In particular, I'm here because I wanted to study a museum in the midst of transforming itself into an environment for active engagement with collection-based stories, knowledge, and information – or 'experiential learning' – and the innovative use of networked media in this context. It has been a rare privilege to be here while the Cooper-Hewitt are going through this change.



New York is no longer "starred with tepees of ermine and peopled with foxes" – it's more kale salads and small dogs. Nonetheless, you can get a sense of some of the experiences I've had since being here on my [#threesixfive project](http://tuhonohono.wordpress.com/) <http://tuhonohono.wordpress.com/> for this year.

The rules for this project are pretty simple. Each day, I take a photograph using my cell phone and Instagram and connect it with one from the past in the online collections of a library, archive or museum. Connections can be visual, geographical, conceptual, or tangentially semantic.

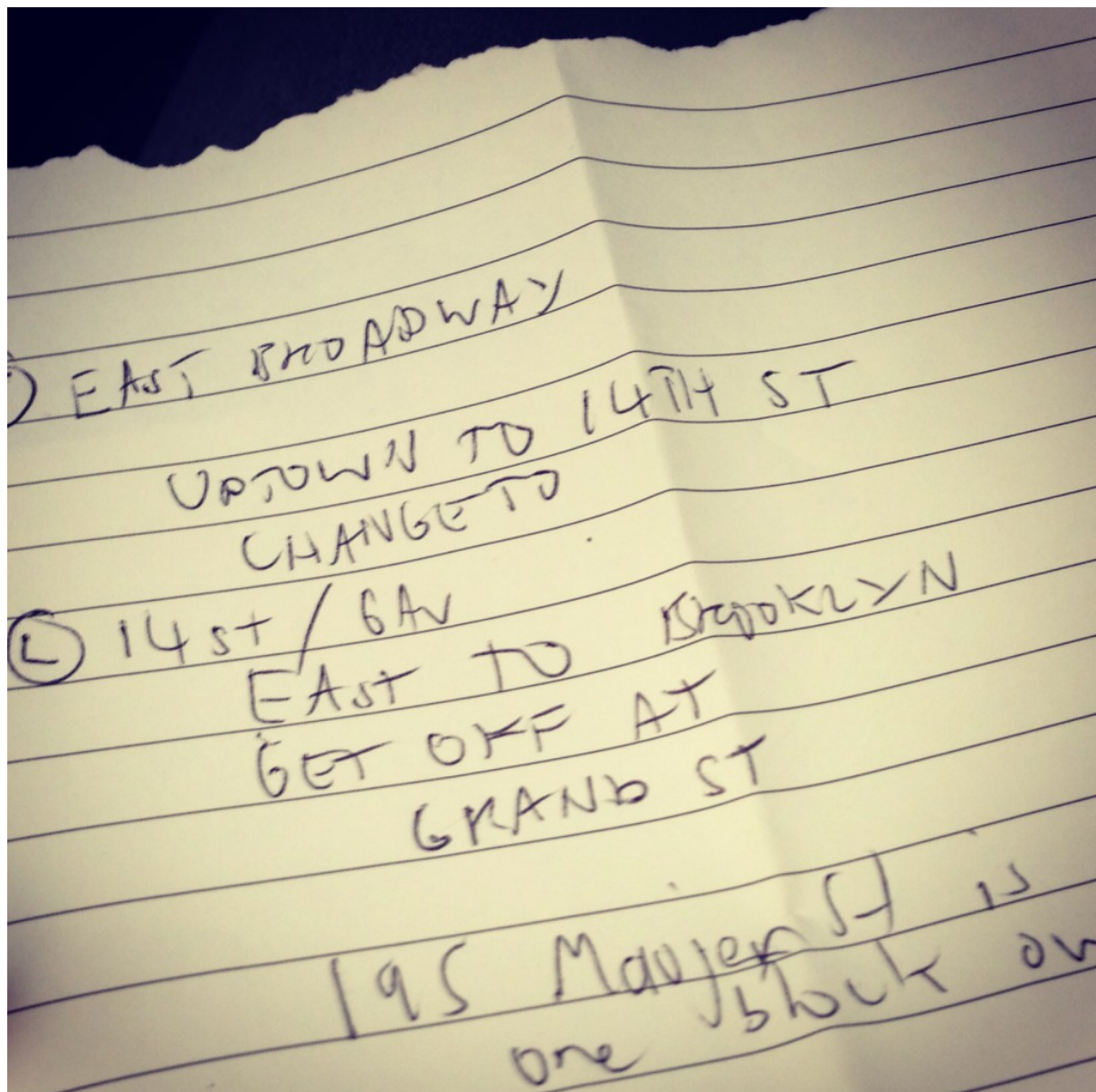
In New Zealand, I draw on historical images from the pictorial collections of the Alexander Turnbull Library, largely because they make their online items so easy to share and re-use. Here, I'm borrowing (with permission) material from the New York Public Library.

I sometimes refer to this as my 'this is water' project, in reference to David Foster Wallace's [commencement address](http://moreintelligentlife.com/story/david-foster-wallace-in-his-own-words) <http://moreintelligentlife.com/story/david-foster-wallace-in-his-own-words> to the graduates of Kenyon College in 2005. As Wallace describes 'learning how to think' in his post-modern way:

It means being conscious and aware enough to choose what you pay attention to and to choose how you construct meaning from experience.

I choose to pay attention to the present as well as the past presents within it. I think this is also a reasonably accurate description of the work the team behind the Cooper-Hewitt Labs, and those they work with in the wider museum, are doing as well.

*



I've had an eclectic curriculum while I've been here. If my learning journey were a mythic story, it would go a bit like this:

Act One:

- The ordinary world: I go about my daily life working for the government in New Zealand, but know that I am lacking in-depth knowledge of how to move from 'publishing content' to 'designing experiences' for learning.
- Call to adventure: I get an email from LIANZA telling me that I have won an award to gain this knowledge. (A major earthquake also strikes the city).

– Meeting with the mentor: Seb Chan begins preparing me from afar to face the unknown. Emails and instructions arrive. I find an apartment. I book tickets for planes and theatre shows.

– Crossing the threshold: I cross from the ordinary world into the special world. Seb invites me to Central Park (near the Cooper-Hewitt museum) with his family. I get instructions for catching the subway and learn where to get palatable coffee. I obtain a subway ticket – my talisman.

Act Two:

– Approach to the Inmost Cave: I re-enter the subway and enter the Cooper-Hewitt where the object of my quest (knowledge) exists. There are security guards and curators and educators. I meet the members of the Cooper-Hewitt labs team. There is a mash-up picture on the wall of a cat with a unicorn horn. Another shows a cat being . . . Wait, what's happening in that image?

Things happen . . . I get a virus and lose my voice . . . and then here I am three weeks later preparing to return home to the ordinary world, bottling some of the elixir by way of this blog post.

I draw on the idea of mythic storytelling not to be clever (well, maybe a little bit), but also to introduce some of the values and influences shaping the Cooper-Hewitt's approach to their museum redevelopment.

Seb has written great posts on the two experimental theatre pieces *Then She Fell* by Third Rails Projects and *Sleep No More* by Punchdrunk over on [Fresh and New](http://www.freshandnew.org/2013/07/non-linear/) <http://www.freshandnew.org/2013/07/non-linear/>. Among other things, these hint at the Cooper-Hewitt's choice to knowingly break the rules and tell stories in a non-linear way. I won't cover the same ground here.

Another [key inspiration](http://www.freshandnew.org/2011/10/experiencing-the-o-at-mona-a-review/) <http://www.freshandnew.org/2011/10/experiencing-the-o-at-mona-a-review/> is the Museum of New Art in Tasmania.

The idea of the talisman (in *Then She Fell* a set of keys; in *Sleep No More* a white mask; in MONA the 'o') is an important one and seems to inform the Cooper-Hewitt's approach to visitor technology. Devices that are accessible to all, the visitor's ability to unlock stories through interaction, and the availability of all the information about collection items being online af-

ter you visit are also relevant.

In addition to the 'memorability' of the event, a few other thoughts spring to mind on elements of Then She Fell and Sleep No More. Both relate to a conversation I had with Jake Barton of Local Projects on the relationship of audience to successful experience design. I'll talk more about Local Projects later in this post.

Meanwhile, in both Sleep No More and Then She Fell, all you are given as you are guided to cross the threshold into the story-world are the rules for engagement and a talisman. Beyond this the 'set' (which incorporates the atmosphere and fabric of the site it is layered over) feels simultaneously theatrical (magical) and life-like (real).

I mention this because of the observation Jake made on creating digital applications that are wondrous enough to work for everyone because they tap into real-world human experiences. Obviously you wouldn't take an eight year old to Sleep No More, so content choices are important. But the fundamental interaction works for everyone. This is also the case with the Cleveland Art Museum [line and shape interactive](http://mw2013.museumsandtheweb.com/paper/transforming-the-art-museum-experience-gallery-one-2/)

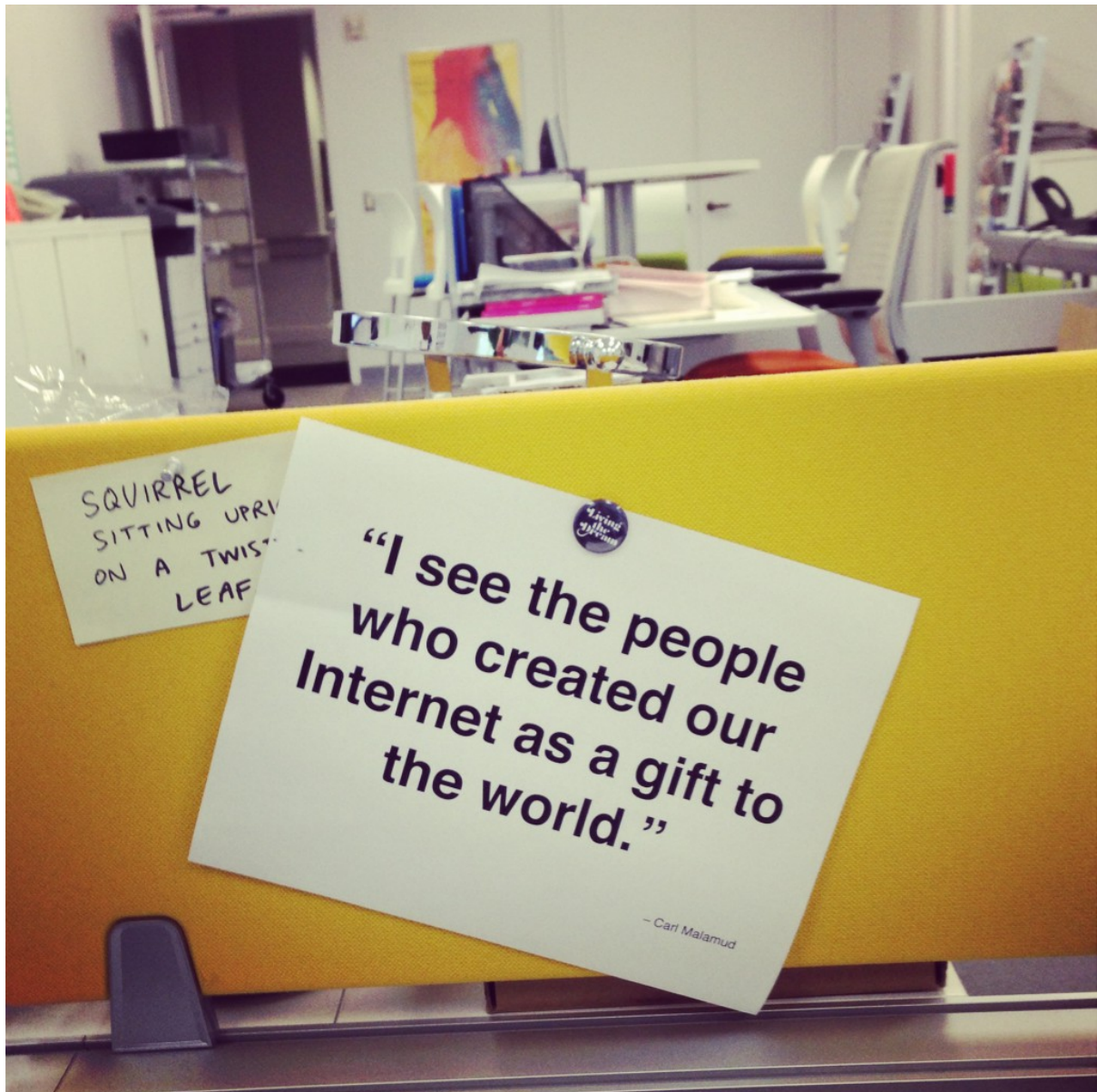
<http://mw2013.museumsandtheweb.com/paper/transforming-the-art-museum-experience-gallery-one-2/> .

In Then She Fell, these interactions are also personalised and, while guided, audience members make choices that drive the outcome of the scene. Taking dictation for the Mad Hatter using a fountain pen, for example, an actor improvised and remarked "my, you do have nice handwriting. I can see why you come highly recommended". In another scene plucked from the database of scenes, a doctor asked me a series of questions as he progressively concocted a blend of tea for me, which I then drank. Other scenes were arrestingly intimate.

Another striking aspect of these environments is the radical trust the theatre company invests in its audience to be human and responsible. Of course none of the objects or archival files and letters in Sleep No More or Then She Fell are real, nor are the books copies of last resort.

But the fact that you can touch them and leaf through them and hold them in your hand, or that you can *use them* to figure things out is a really potent part of the experience.

★



Quote from Carl Malamud above Aaron Straup Cope's desk.

My time in New York hasn't all been theatre visits and blog publishing. With the Carnegie mansion that houses the Cooper-Hewitt closed for renovation and expansion of the public gallery space, I've also been spending time with staff immersed in the process of design and [making](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/a-timeline-of-event-horizons/) <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/a-timeline-of-event-horizons/>.

When the building re-opens next year, the museum will be an environment that, as Jake Barton of Local Projects put it, "makes design something people can participate in" – not just look at or learn 'about' through didactic label text or the end-product of someone else's cre-

ativity.

Local Projects are the media partners for the Cooper-Hewitt refurbishment, with architects Diller Scofidio + Renfro. Their philosophy is encapsulated in a quote from Confucius that Jake frequently references in his [public talks](http://www.ted.com/talks/jake_barton_the_museum_of_you.html) http://www.ted.com/talks/jake_barton_the_museum_of_you.html;

I hear and I forget.

I see and I remember.

I do and I understand.

You can see how complementary this thinking is with the immersive theatre environments of *Sleep No More* and *Then She Fell*.

By way of illustration, the Cooper-Hewitt wants to encourage a more diverse range of visitors to learn about design by letting them collect and interact with networked collection objects and interpretive content in the galleries.

New Zealanders might think of the [‘lifelines’ table](http://natlib.govt.nz/blog/posts/our-history-up-close-and-personal) <http://natlib.govt.nz/blog/posts/our-history-up-close-and-personal> at the National Library of New Zealand designed by Clicksuite, which is driven off the [Digital New Zealand API](http://www.digitalnz.org.nz/) <http://www.digitalnz.org.nz/>; and Americans might recall the recent [collection wall](http://www.clevelandart.org/gallery-one/collection-wall) <http://www.clevelandart.org/gallery-one/collection-wall> at the Cleveland Art Museum, also designed by Local Projects.

But the Cooper-Hewitt is neither a library nor an art museum. It’s a design museum – “the only museum in the United States dedicated just to historic and contemporary design”.

Consequently, applications Local Projects develops with the museum also seek to incorporate design process layers where visitors can make connections and learn more about objects on display and also be designers.

The challenge, as Jake articulated it when we met, is ‘how you transmit knowledge within experiential learning (the elixir)?’. How do you make information seep in in a deeper way so that visitors or audience members do, in fact, learn?

The gradual reveal of the story in *Then She Fell*, with spaces also for solitary reflection and contemplation, is significant I think. I suspect I’m not the only one who googled the relation-

ship of Alice Liddell to Lewis Carroll in the days after the performance.

★

If Then She Fell and Sleep No More were like slipping into a forgotten analogue world of the collection stores, [Massive Attack v Adam Curtis](http://www.armoryonpark.org/programs_events/detail/Massive_Attack_V_Adam_Curtis) http://www.armoryonpark.org/programs_events/detail/Massive_Attack_V_Adam_Curtis was like all of the digitization projects of the past decade come back to haunt you.

Curtis describes this 'total experience' as a "a gilm' – a new way of integrating a gig with a film that has a powerful overall narrative and emotional individual stories". It's not too far a cry from the word we use in New Zealand to describe the collecting sector of galleries, libraries archives and museums and their potential for digital convergence: a glam.

Imagine Jane Fonda jazzercising it up on a dozen or so massive screens on three walls of a venue, collaged with Adam Curtis' commentary on how the 80s instituted a new regime of bodily management and control, and Massive Attack with Liz Fraser and Horace Andy covering 80s tunes that you can't help moving along with. This is the first time I've experienced kinesthetic-visual juxtaposition as a storytelling technique.

It is really hard to find yourself dancing to the aftermath of Chernobyl. It is also very memorable.

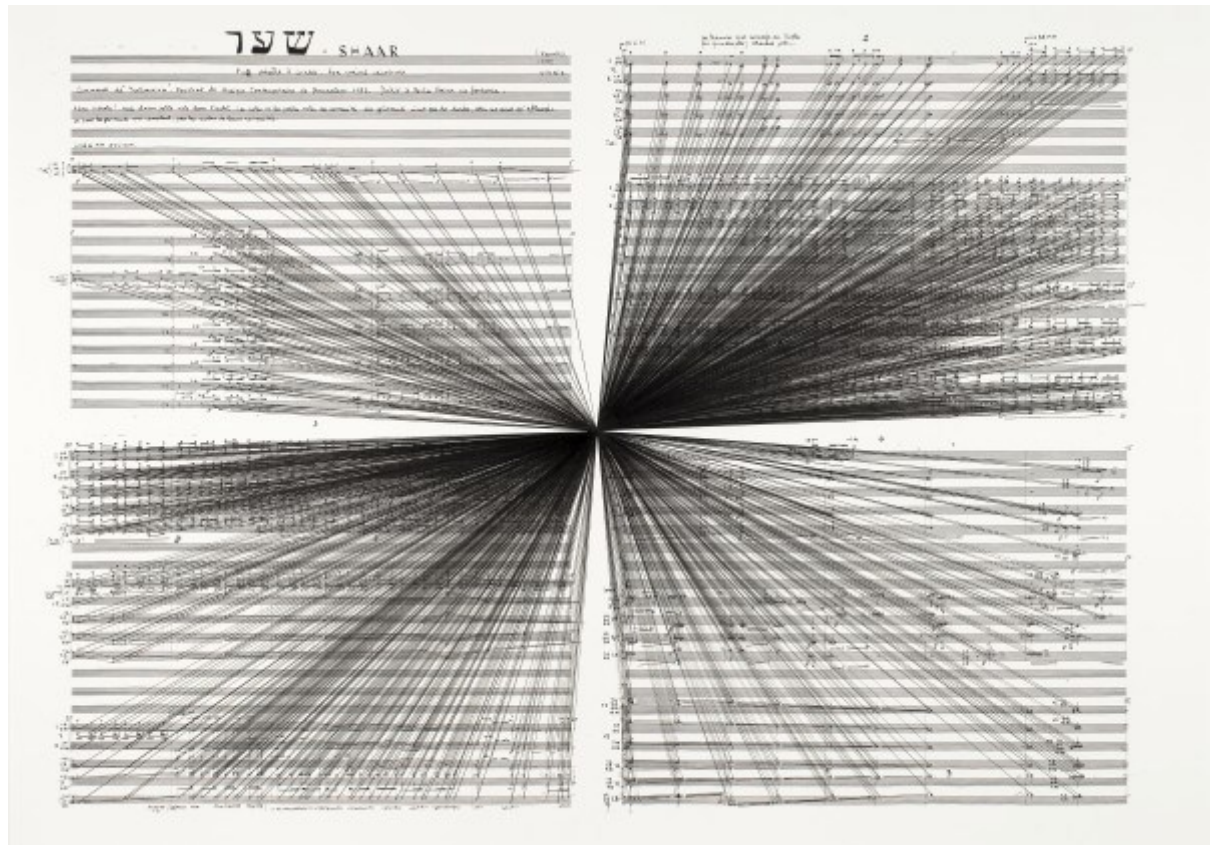
As Curtis describes the collaboration between United Visual Artists, Punchdrunk's Felix Barrett and stage designer Es Devlin: "What links us is not just cutting stuff up – but an interest in trying to change the way people see power and politics in the modern world."

"I see the people who created our Internet as a gift to the world" – Carl Malamud

"A fake, but enchanting world which we all live in today – but which has also become a new kind of prison that prevents us moving forward into the future" – Adam Curtis

How do we transform our institutions into way-finding devices for the cultural landscapes of the present and past presents, not prisons?

★



Marco Fusinato, *'Mass Black Implosion (Shaar, Iannis Xenakis)* <http://galleristny.com/2013/08/now-hear-this-for-42-years-barbara-london-has-been-making-noise-at-moma/> ' 2012. (Courtesy the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery)

"To make these drawings, Fusinato chose a single note as a focal point and then painstakingly connected it to every other note on the page" – MOMA interpretation label

Like many museums around the world, the Cooper-Hewitt as a Smithsonian-Institution [has been seeking](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2012/lost-collection-alpha/) <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2012/lost-collection-alpha/> to broaden access to its collections online and deepen relationships with its audiences.

Much of the recent work of the museum that I've observed has focused on establishing two-way connections and associations between each of the many hundreds of objects that will

physically be on display in the galleries and at least ten related 'virtual' objects and related media.

These thousands of digital objects in total will be available through the Cooper Hewitt's collections API, which will also be a foundation for interactive experiences and other applications where people can manipulate and do things with content to learn more about design and the stories embedded in the museum's collections.

But there's a snag.

The vast majority of information and story potential, the knowledge and the ability to see meaningful and significant connections, isn't in the database. It's in the heads of the collection experts: the curators. Extracting this narrative and getting it into useful digital form is a huge undertaking.

Progress is being made though. I happily sat in on a checkpoint meeting for curators to make sure that objects they were tagging with a vocabulary (co-designed with the museum's educators who bring "verbs to the curator's nouns") would not be orphaned. If objects are tagged, and another curator doesn't use the same tag, the connection will be lost.

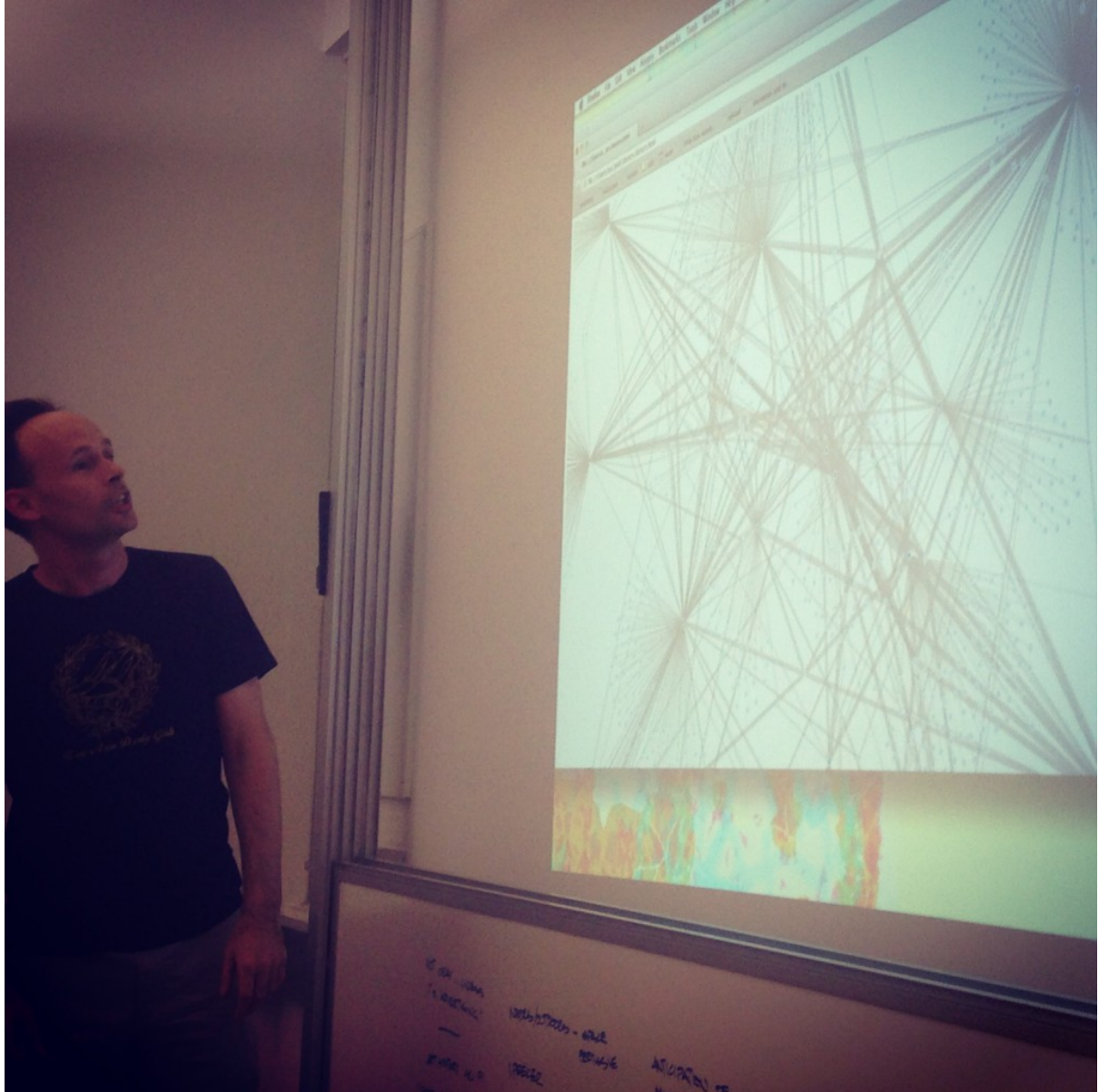
Thus, as one curator put out a call for colleagues to dive into their part of a collection, a wallpaper with a Z pattern found its match in a Zig Zag chair. Pleated paper found its match in an Issey Miyake dress. This is a laborious and time-consuming process, coordinated by Head of Cross-Platform Publishing Pam Horn.

But it means that the collection is starting to come alive in that '1 + 1 = 4' way that is so magical. Through a balance of curatorial and automated processes, these connections and pathways through the collection will (all going to plan) continue to multiply over the months to come.

Visitors will also be able to find their own way through the knowledge the museum holds, and access all of the data online – much as every museum is also trying to connect pre- and post-visits together.

"Now find your own way home" – Massive Attack v Adam Curtis

*



Aaron exposes the power structure that is the donor walls of New York City – Pratt Institute, 14th Street.

On Tuesday nights I've been accompanying Seb and Aaron to teach a graduate class at Pratt Institute called Museums and the Network (subtitle Caravaggio in the age of Dan Flavin lights). The syllabus states: "Museums have been deeply impacted by the changes in the digi-

tal landscape.

At the same time they are buffeted by the demographic transformations of their constituent communities and changes in education. The collapsing barriers to collection, publishing and distribution afforded by the internet have further eroded the museum's role as cultural conduit."

It's a wonderful learning environment, full of serious play and playful seriousness; theoretical ideas and practical examples. Just like the real Cooper-Hewitt Labs.

The students' ultimate project will be to create an exhibit – perhaps out of the collection of donor walls of New York's museums – one of the class' first assignments. Donor walls loom large and prominently in the cultural institutions here. So much of the work of the sector is funded through endowments and private donations.

Like the Cooper-Hewitt, the students have started by digitising the donor walls and turning all their data into a structured open form so that they (and others) can start to tell stories out of it and present it through a web interface. They are gradually building up to staging an exhibition, "that exists at the intersection of the physical and the internet, from concept through development".

The [readings](https://pinboard.in/u:straup/t:museums-and-the-network/) <https://pinboard.in/u:straup/t:museums-and-the-network/> from this class have become my Instapaper companions as I commute for 40 minutes up the island of Manhattan each morning, and home again. I've also started to imagine a museum exhibit of my time in New York. Or perhaps it's a conceptual art piece or a marketing intervention.



Whatever it is, you enter a space that looks like a real installation install. It's probably painted off-white. There are pieces of papers on the wall with numbers, plinths on which objects could stand, sheets of blank paper in cabinet drawers, empty glass cases and maybe even 3D replicas of framed paintings that are also off-white.

A docent (in New Zealand we call them visitor hosts) guides you to an "information desk" where you can collect a mobile guide or brochures in exchange for your own personal cell phone, which you must check in. You are told that you can read whatever you like on the guide, but you must not erase the content you find there or create new content.

You are told how to use the phone to interact with the numbers on the walls.

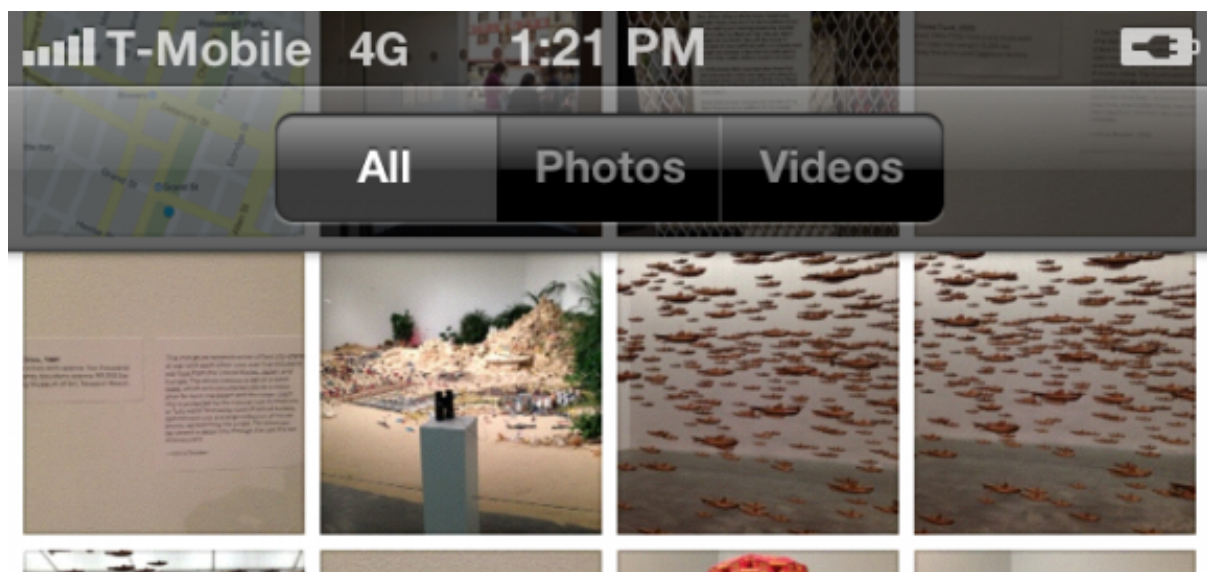
Exploring the various applications on the phone you begin to uncover the story of the visitor who came before you. You read their text messages, look at their Instagram feed, explore their Twitter profile and open their photographs (which show photographs of objects, followed by labels with prominent numbers matching the ones on the walls). Maybe there's a projector installed.

As you stand next to your friend in front of the same object (perhaps it's the 3D-printed white replica of a framed painting with no texture to indicate the pictorial content) you realize that you have different content on your phones. They are seeing a Van Gogh at #7, you a Rembrandt. You talk about what you (can't) see. Perhaps there are also some color-less 3D printed replicas of sculptural pieces or other collection items you can hold.

Other audience members text #7 to the number they have been given, and are sent back a record for an object. This is a [project that Micah has been playing with](http://labs.cooperhewitt-t.org/2013/object-phone/) <http://labs.cooperhewitt-t.org/2013/object-phone/> using the collections API, using Twilio.

As you hand back the device, you are given the address of a museum where you can see the collection and a URL for it online. Perhaps you exit through a gift shop where you can buy printed postcards of what you didn't see.

Enough speculation. This is not the collaborative project I came here to consider. Nor am I entirely serious (well, maybe a little bit serious).





(Record of trip to New Museum)

*

There are many comments I could make about the differences and similarities between what I've experienced in my short time in New York City and what is familiar to me back home.

At the risk of generalizing, I could talk about the constraints that the grant-based funding model here seem to place on the ability to play a long game with digital infrastructure or to embed sustainable museological practice into the fabric of the institution.

I could talk about how the Cooper-Hewitt seems to run on a skeleton staff of just 73 people, which is small (even by New Zealand standards), for a national institution. How [museums I have worked with in New Zealand](http://www.aucklandmuseum.com/) http://www.aucklandmuseum.com/ use visitor and market research and audience segmentation as a foundation for decision-making about programming opportunities, which seems less evident here.

I could mention how far ahead collection documentation and interpretation strategies seem in museums with equivalent missions in New Zealand such as Te Papa – where relating exhibition label text, narratives, external collections and content assets such as videos around online collections is now everyday practice.

I could talk about how 'coffee plunger' is a dirty word for French press, how people walk on the wrong side of the sidewalk, and how the light switches go up not down to power on the light. But these are just surface differences for the same basic human motivations.

What I want to highlight, however, isn't any of these things. Nor is it a comparison. It's the willingness I've seen of staff at the Cooper-Hewitt to start working together across disciplinary boundaries and departments (education/curatorial/digital media) to continue Bill Moggridge's vision for an 'active visitor' to the museum.

This kind of cultural change takes time. (And time already moves slower in museums than the real world). It's messy and confusing and identity-challenging. It's hard to achieve when short-term priorities and established modes of operating keep jostling for the attention of the same staff who need to be its agents.

Yet everyone I have met in my short time here has been so friendly and willing to share infor-

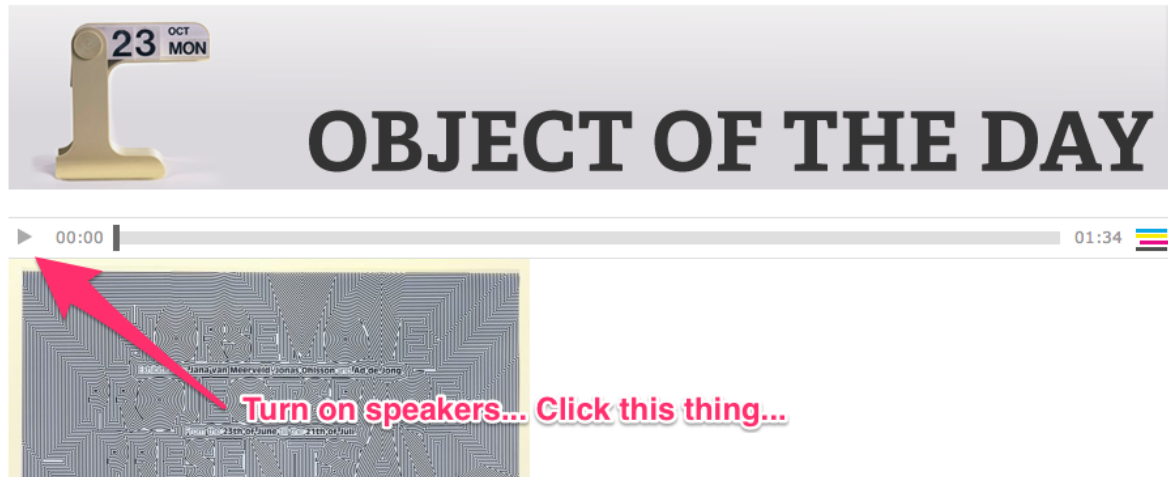
mation with me. Echoing the sentiment of many that I have talked to at the Cooper-Hewitt, I am also hugely grateful to Seb for his encouraging mentorship and guidance, and Aaron for challenging me to think harder.

As Larry Wall puts it in '[Perl, the first postmodern computer language](http://www.wall.org/~larry/pm.html) http://www.wall.org/~larry/pm.html', "these are the people who inhabit the intersections of the Venn diagrams". The accessibility to experience made possible by the Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum in New York City will be so much richer for their efforts.

I hope it continues to grow and flourish for many years to come.

This entry was posted in [Meta Issues](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/meta-issues/) http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/meta-issues/ and tagged [Larry Wall](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/tag/larrywall/) http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/tag/larrywall/, [longreads](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/tag/longreads/) http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/tag/longreads/, [strategy](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/tag/strategy/) http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/tag/strategy/ on October 5, 2013 [http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/a-kiwi-spend-three-weeks-in-the-cooper-hewitt-labs/] by [viriniagow](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/viriniagow/) http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/viriniagow/.

Voices on our blog! A new Labs experiment



I have recently been experimenting with a new service on the web called [SpokenLayer](http://spokenlayer.com). SpokenLayer offers a network of on demand “human voices” who are ready to voice content on the web. SpokenLayer works completely behind the scenes and in an on-demand kind of way. As new page requests come in, SpokenLayer adds them to your queue. Then, the content is sent to SpokenLayer’s Mechanical-Turk-like network of recording artists who voice your content in small recording studios around the world. New sound recordings are then automatically added to your site via a simple Javascript snippet.

There are many possibilities for how Cooper-Hewitt might utilize this kind of a service. We see this as a useful way of experimenting with the podcast-ability of our content, bringing our content to a wider audience and allowing for better accessibility to those who need it. It also works nicely when you are on the go, and I am really eager to figure out how we might connect this up to our own [collections API](http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/api).

For a first pass we’ve decided to try it out on the [Object of the Day](http://www.cooperhewitt.org/object-of-the-day) blog. From now on, you will notice a small audio player at the top of each Object of the Day post. Click the play button on the left and you will be able to hear the “voiced” version of each day’s post (be sure to turn on your computer’s speakers). It usually takes anywhere from a half hour to a day for a new audio recording to appear.

I thought this one was particularly good as the recording artist was able to do a pretty good job with some of the Dutch accented words in the text.

<http://www.cooperhewitt.org/object-of-the-day/2013/11/03/horsemove-projectspace-poster> <http://www.cooperhewitt.org/object-of-the-day/2013/11/03/horsemove-projectspace-poster>

It is an experiment and we'll see how it goes. Here are a few examples you can listen to right now.

<http://www.cooperhewitt.org/object-of-the-day/2013/11/02/birdcage-fishbowl> <http://www.cooperhewitt.org/object-of-the-day/2013/11/02/birdcage-fishbowl>

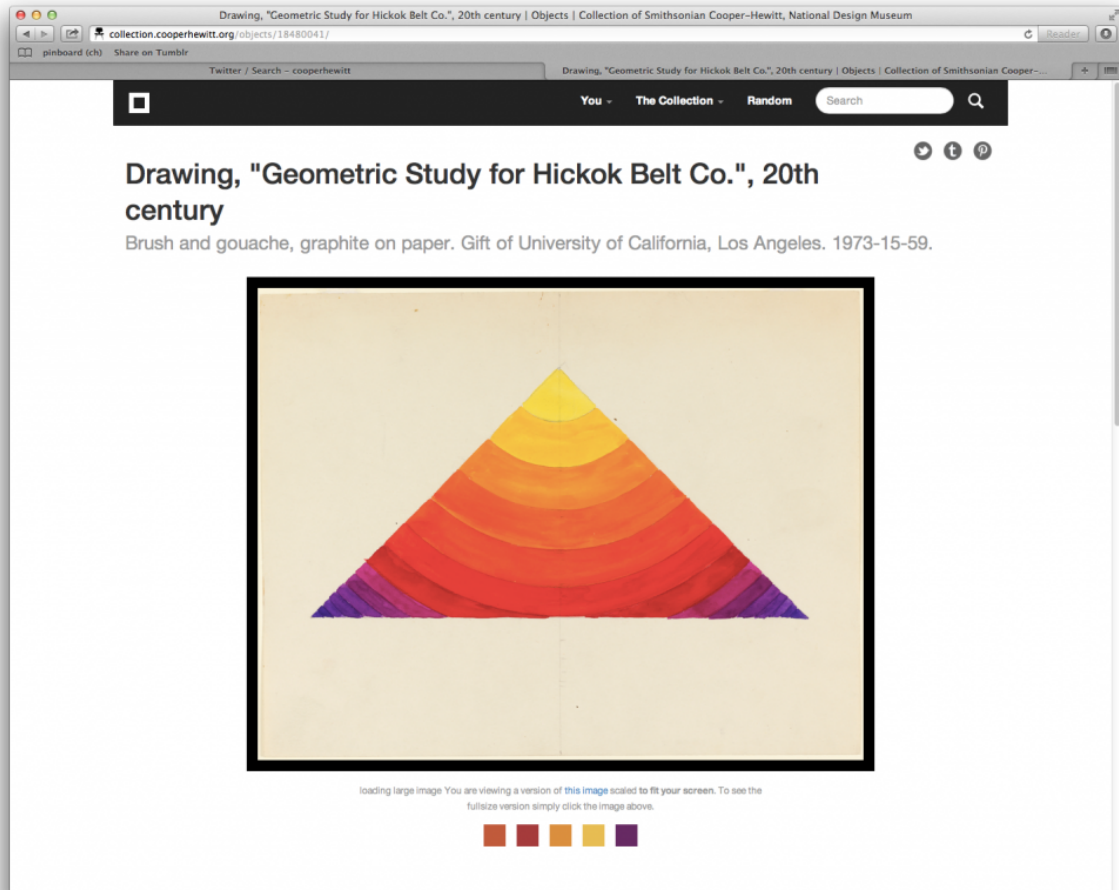
<http://www.cooperhewitt.org/object-of-the-day/2013/11/01/turbo> <http://www.cooperhewitt.org/object-of-the-day/2013/11/01/turbo>

<http://www.cooperhewitt.org/object-of-the-day/2013/10/28/horsehair-jewelry> <http://www.cooperhewitt.org/object-of-the-day/2013/10/28/horsehair-jewelry>

<http://www.cooperhewitt.org/object-of-the-day/2013/11/04/casements-more-structural-interest> <http://www.cooperhewitt.org/object-of-the-day/2013/11/04/casements-more-structural-interest>

This entry was posted in Experimental <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/experimental/> *on November 4, 2013* [\[http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/voices-on-our-blog-a-new-labs-experiment/\]](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/voices-on-our-blog-a-new-labs-experiment/) *by micah* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/micah/>.

"B" is for beta



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Screen-Shot-2013-11-14-at-1.51.06-PM.png>

Without a [whole lot of fanfare](https://twitter.com/cooperhewittlab/status/401063311217012736) <https://twitter.com/cooperhewittlab/status/401063311217012736> we released the beta version of the collections website, yesterday. The [alpha version](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2012/lost-collection-alpha/) <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2012/lost-collection-alpha/> was released a little over a year ago and it was finally time to apply lessons learned and to reconsider some of the decisions that we made in the summer of 2012.

At the time the alpha version was released it was designed around the idea that *we didn't know* what we wanted the site to be or, more importantly, what the site needed to be. We have always said that the collections website is meant to be a reflection of the overall direction the Cooper-Hewitt is heading as we re-imagine what a design museum might be in the

21st century. To that end the most important thing in 2012 was developing tools [that could be changed and tweaked as quickly as possible](http://www.aaronland.info/weblog/2012/11/09/jello/#parallel-tms) in order to prove and disprove ideas as they came up.

The beta website is not a finished product but a bunch of little steps on the way to the larger brand redesign that is underway as I write this. One of those small steps is a clean(er) and modular visual design that not only highlights the objects in the collection but does so in a way that is adaptable to a variety of screens and devices.

To that end, the first thing we did was to the object pages to make sure that the primary image for an object *always* appears above the fold.

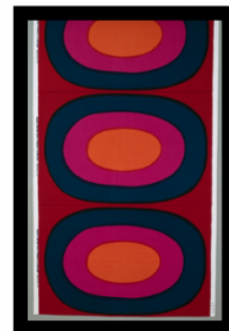
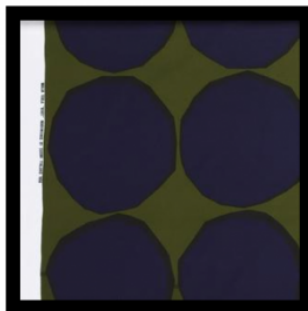
This is the first of many small changes that have been made, and that work, but that still need proper love and nurturing and spit and polish to make them feel like magic. In order to make the page load quickly we first load a [small black and white version](http://images.collection.cooperhewitt.org/39391_4a0693cdc5269094_d.gif) of the object that serves as a placeholder. At the same we are fetching [the small colour version](http://images.collection.cooperhewitt.org/39391_4a0693cdc5269094_n.jpg) as well as the [the large ooh-shiny version](http://images.collection.cooperhewitt.org/39391_4a0693cdc5269094_b.jpg), each replacing the other as your browser retrieves them from the Internet.

Once the largest version has loaded it will re-size itself dynamically so that its full height is always visible in your browser window. All the metadata about the object is still available but it's just been pushed below the fold.

[Metadata is great](http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2013-11-07/the-hidden-technology-that-makes-twitter-huge) but... you know, giant pictures!

Maija Isola

Finnish, 1927 - 2001



We have **10 objects** that Maija Isola has been involved with. [See all of them.](#)

Maija Isola has had a hand in **10 objects** that are part of our collection. Specifically: **10 objects** as [Designer](#).

Maija Isola has been involved in work collected by the following departments: **10 objects** from [Textiles](#).

Short URL: <http://cprhw.tt/p/2AvAi/>

Person ID: **18049849**

Tag as: **ch:person=18049849**

We're also pretty confident we know who **Maija Isola** is at [Freebase](#) and [Wikipedia](#).

Maija Isola (born 15 March 1927 in Riihimäki, Finland, died 3 March 2001) was a leading Finnish designer of printed textiles. She also had a career as a visual artist. Life and career ... [more](#).

<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/isola.png>

The second thing we did was standardize on square thumbnails for object list views.

This was made possible by Micah's work [calculating the Shannon entropy value for an image](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/default-sort-or-what-would-shannon-do/) <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/default-sort-or-what-would-shannon-do/>. One way to think about Shannon entropy is as the measure of "activity" in an image and Micah applied that work to the problem of determining where the most-best place to crop a image might be. There's definitely some work and bug fixes that need to be done on the code but most of the time it is delightfully good at choosing an area to crop.

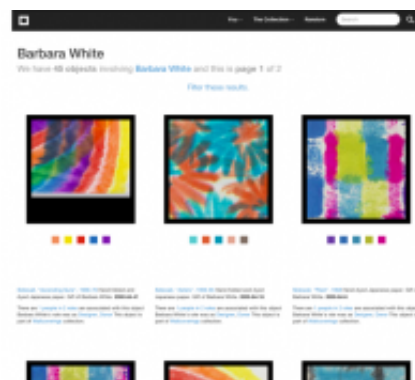


http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/cooper_hewitt_mouseover.gif

As you move your mouse over the [square version](http://images.collection.cooperhewitt.org/20052_38bb2c52430-ca70f_sq.jpg) we will replace it with the [small thumbnail of the complete image](http://images.collection.cooperhewitt.org/20052_38bb2c52430ca70f_n.jpg) (and then replace it again with the square version when you mouse out). Thanks to [Sha Hwang](https://twitter.com/shashashasha) for making a handy [animated gif](http://gifpop.io/) of the process to illustrate things.

Given the cacophony of (object) shapes and sizes in our collection standardizing on square thumbnails has some definite advantages when it comes to designing a layout.

~~Although the code to calculate Shannon entropy is available on our GitHub account the code to do the cropping is not yet. Hopefully we can fix that in the next week and we would welcome your bug fixes and suggestions for improving things. Update: Micah has made the repository for his panel-of-experts code which includes the crop-by-Shannon-entropy stuff public and promises that a blog post will follow, shortly.~~





<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/barbara-white-sm.png>

mmmmmm....pretty!

It is worth noting that our approach owes a debt of inspiration and gratitude to the work that [The Rijksmuseum](https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/) <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/> has done around their own collections website. Above and beyond their efforts to produce high quality digital reproductions of their collection objects and then freely share them with their audiences under a [Creative Commons](https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/api/terms-and-conditions-of-use) <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/api/terms-and-conditions-of-use> license they also chose to display those works by emphasizing the details of a painting or drawing (or sculpture) rather than zooming further and further back, literally and conceptually, in order to display the entirety of an object.

You can, of course, still see an object in its totality but by being willing to lead with a close-up and having the faith that users will explore and consider the details (that's sort of the point... right?) it opens up a whole other world of possibilities in how that information is organized and presented. So, thanks Rijksmuseum!



Chess Set, "The Communists and The Capitalists", 1930s

We have 19 images of this object and this is page 1 of 2

[Go back to the object page](#)

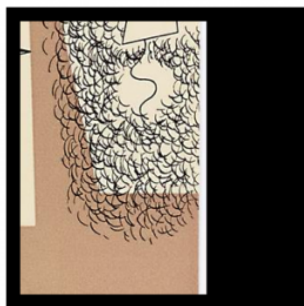


<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/chess-full.png>

In addition to updating the page listing all the images for an object to use square thumbnails we've also made it possible to link to the main object page (the one with all the metadata) using one of those alternate images.

For example the URL for the "The Communists and The Capitalists" chess set is <http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18647699/> <http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18647699/> and by default it displays an image of all the chess pieces lined up as if on a chess board. If you wanted to link to the chess set but instead display the photo of the handsome chap all dressed up in gold and jodhpurs you would simply link to <http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18647699/with-image-12603/> <http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18647699/with-image-12603/>.

The images themselves (on [the object images page](http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18647699/images/) <http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18647699/images/>) all point to their respective with-image-IMAGEID links so just right click on an image to save its permalink.



Book Cover, "Bookjacket by Alvin Lustig for "Three Tales" by Flaubert, New... Lithography in tan and black ink on off-white shiny wove paper. Gift of Tamar Cohen and Dave Slatoff. 1993-31-165-4

There are 2 people in 2 roles are associated with this object Alvin Lustig's role was as Designer, Donor This object is part of Drawings, Prints, and Graphic Design collection.



Book Cover, "Metropolitan Los Angeles: One Community by Mel Scott", 1901-50 Paper. Gift of Susan Lustig Peck. 2001-29-59

There is one person is associated with this object Alvin Lustig's role was as Graphic Designer This object is part of Drawings, Prints, and Graphic Design collection.



Book Cover, "Bookjacket by Alvin Lustig for "Flowers of Evil" by Charles... Lithography in tan and purple ink on off-white wove paper. Gift of Tamar Cohen and Dave Slatoff. 1993-31-165-8

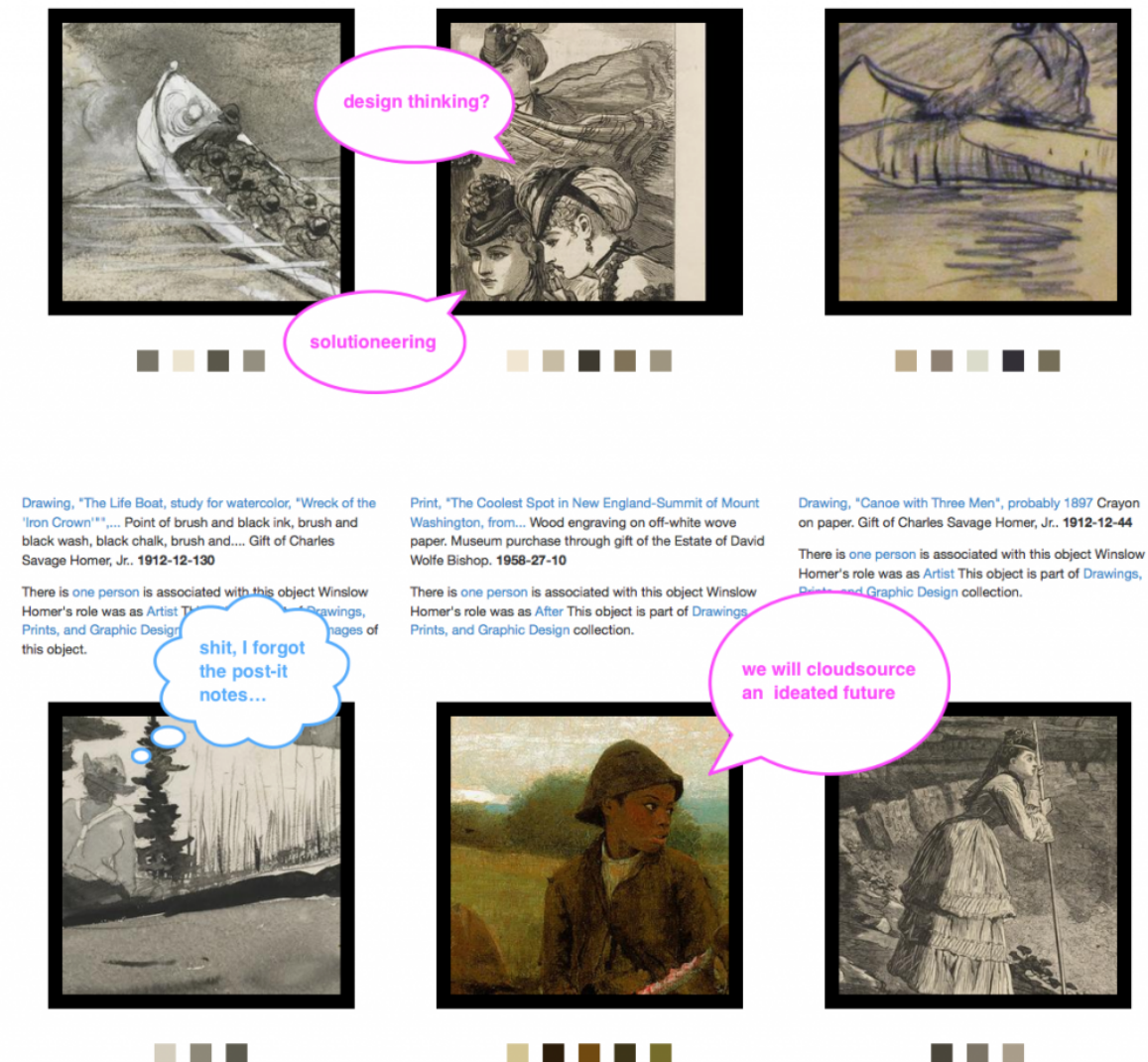
There are 2 people in 2 roles are associated with this object Alvin Lustig's role was as Designer, Donor This object is part of Drawings, Prints, and Graphic Design collection.

<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/lustig-full.png>

On most desktop and laptop displays these square list views end up being displayed three to a row which presents many lovely opportunity for surprising and unexpected "haystack trip-

tychs <http://www.aaronland.info/weblog/2012/04/02/haystack/#parallel-ogram> .

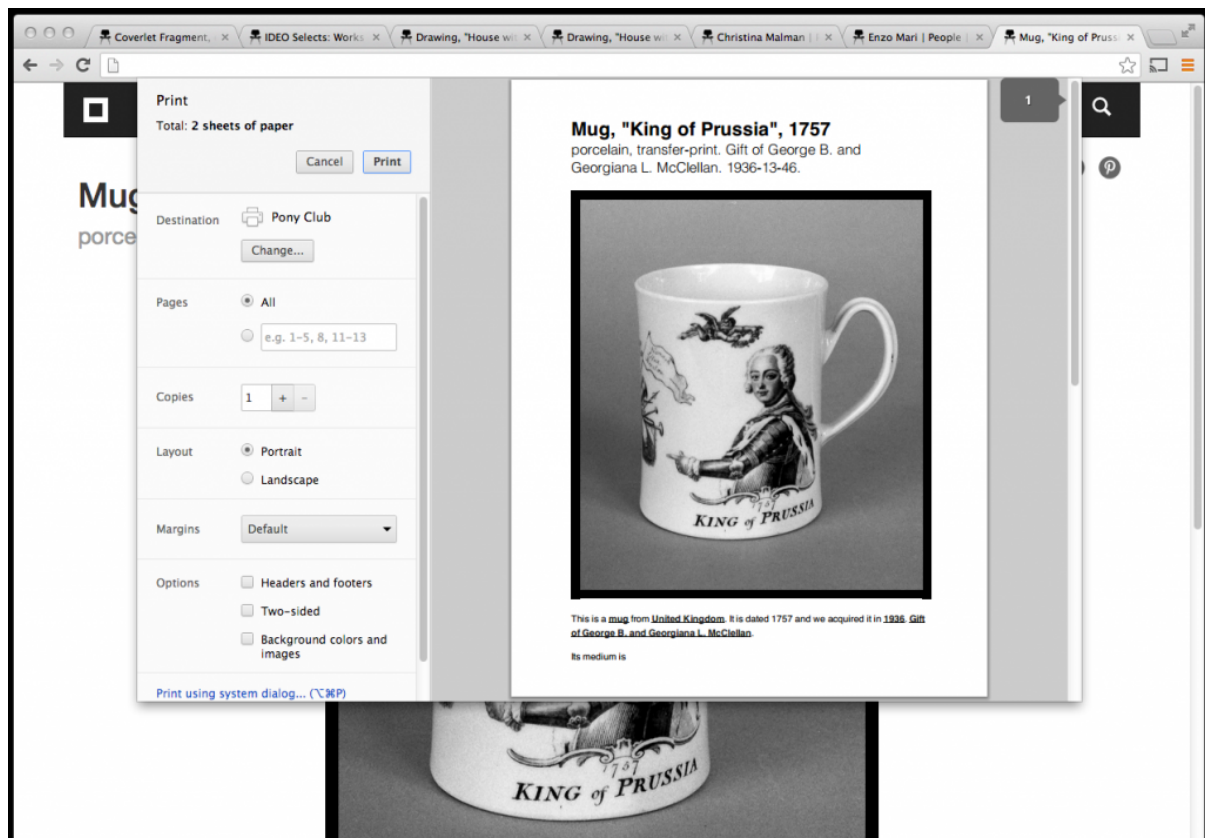
Or even narrative <http://metascott.com/the-narrative-and-collaborative-gutter-of-transmedia/> ... almost.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/homer-comix-text.png>

In the process of moving from alpha to beta it's possible that we may have broken a few things (please [let us know](https://twitter.com/cooperhewittlab/) if you find anything!) but one of the things I wanted to make sure continued to work was [the ability to print a properly formatted version](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/cmd-p/) of an object page.

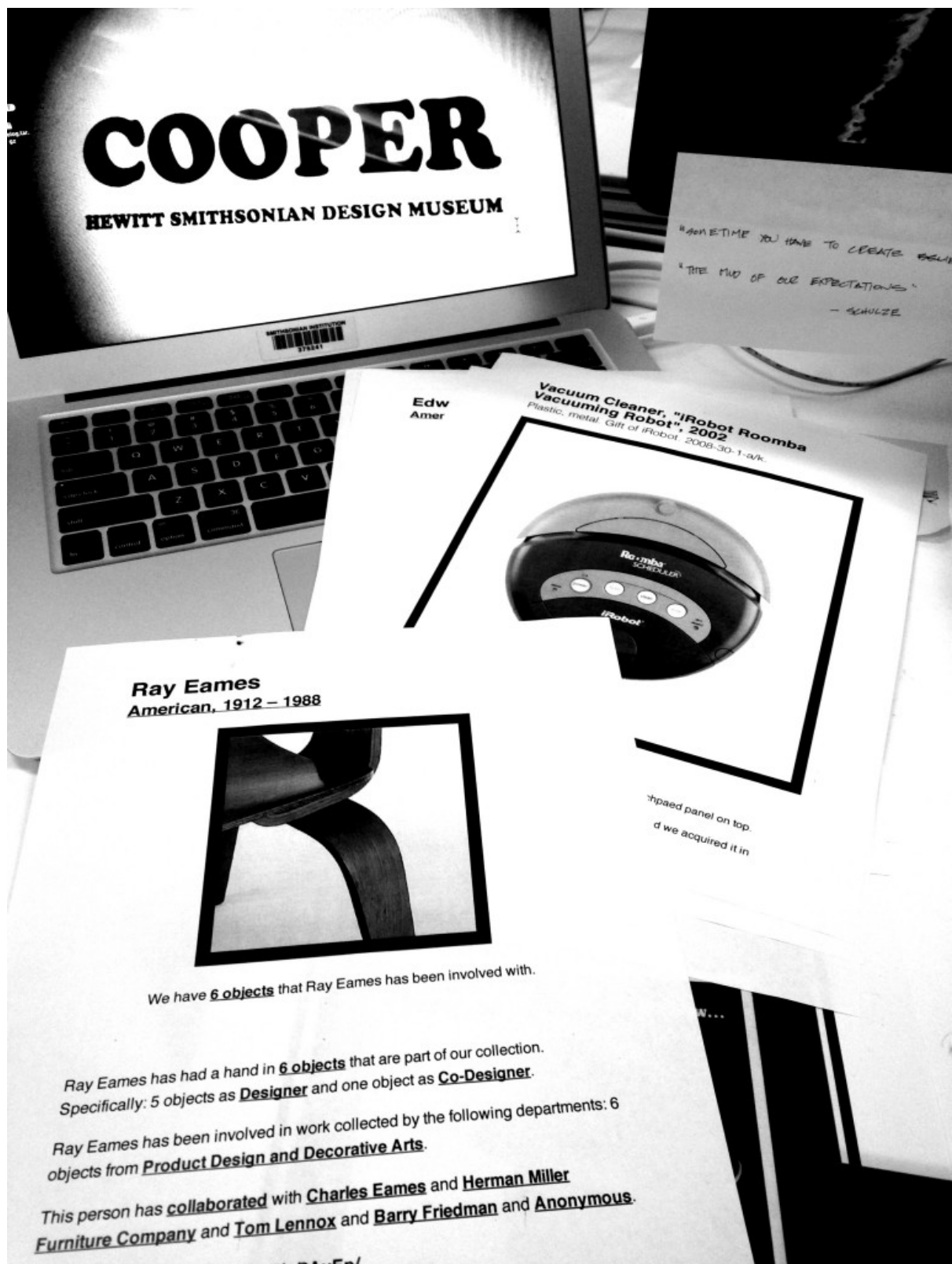
We spend so much time wrestling with the pain around [designing for small screens and big screens and all the screens in between](http://frankchimero.com/what-screens-want/) (I'll get to that in a minute) that we often forget about paper.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Screen-Shot-2013-11-13-at-5.37.41-PM.png>

Lots of people have perfectly good reasons for printing out information from our collection so we would like that experience to be as simple and elegant as the rest of the site. We would like for it to be something that people can take for granted before even knowing it was something they needed.

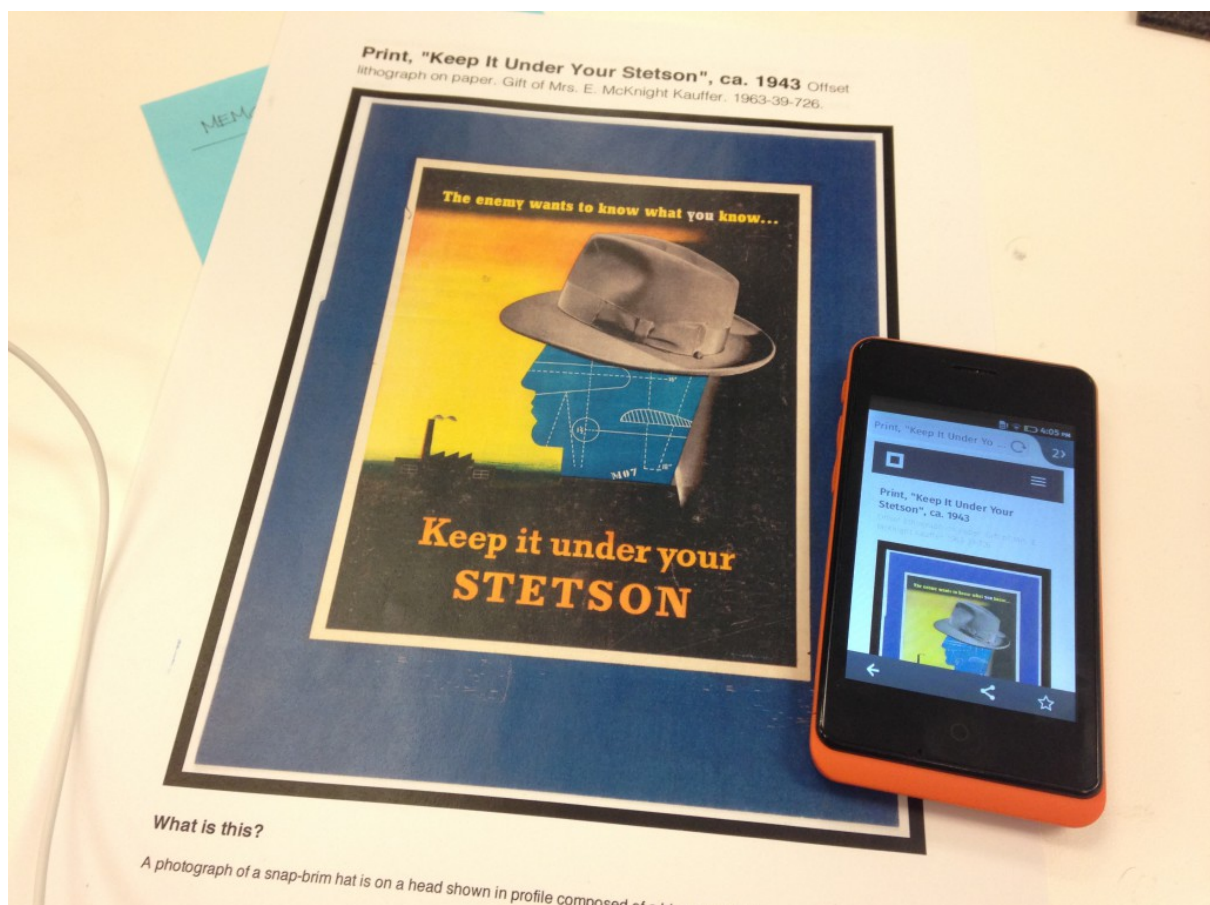
You can print any page obviously but the print-y magic is really only available for object and person pages, right now. Given that the alpha site only supported object pages this still feels like progress.



Finally, mobile.

Optimizing for not-your-laptop is absolutely one of the things that was *not* part of the alpha collections website. It was a conscious decision and, I think, the right one. Accounting for all those devices — and that really means [all those view ports](http://www.quirksmode.org/blog/archives/2013/11/of_viewports_an.html) — is hard and tedious work where the rewards are short-lived assuming you live long enough to even see them. So we punted and that freed us up to think about the all the other things we needed to do.

But it is also true that if you make anything for the web that people start to enjoy they will want to start enjoying it on their phones and all the other tiny screens connected to the Internet that they carry around, these days. So I take it as some small measure of success that we reached a point where planning and designing for “mobile” became a priority.



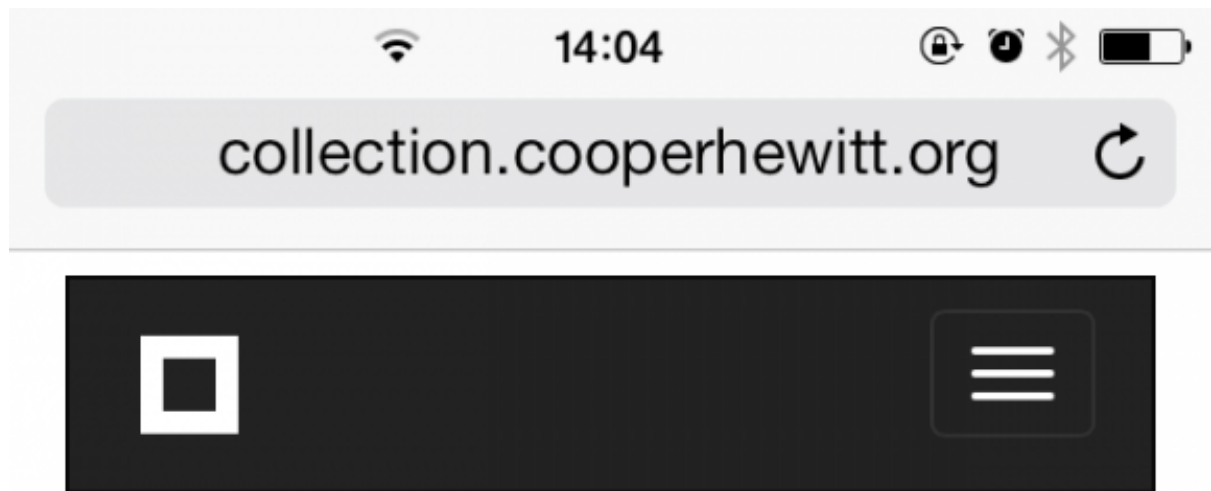
<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/stetson-print-mobile.jpg>

Which means that, like a lot of other people, we used [Bootstrap](http://getbootstrap.com/).

Bootstrap is not without its quirks but the demands that it places on a website are minimal. More importantly the few demands it does place are negligible compared to the pain of accounting for the seemingly infinite and not-in-a-good-way [possibility jelly](http://magicalnihilism.com/2009/02/18/exporting-the-past-into-the-future-or-the-possibility-jelly-lives-on-the-hypersurface-of-the-present/) of browser rendering engines and device constraints.

The nice folks at [Twitter](http://www.twitter.com/) had to figure this out for themselves. I choose to believe that they gave their work back to the Internet as a gift and because there is no glory in forcing other people to suffer the same pain you did. We all have better things to do with our time, like working on actual features. So, thanks Twitter!

We're still working out the kinks using the collections website on a phone or a tablet and I expect that will continue for a while. A big part of the exercise going from alpha to beta was putting the scaffolding in place where we can iterate on the problem of designing a collections website that works equally well on a 4-inch screen as it does on a 55-inch screen. *To give us a surface area that will afford us another year of focusing on the things we need to pay attention to rather always looking over our shoulders for a herd of thundering yaks demanding to be shaved*



Welcome to the beta release of our new collection database!

This is our stuff, we have lots of it



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/iphone.png>

A few known-knowns, in closing:

- IE 9 — there are some problems with lists and the navigation menus. We're working on it.
- ~~The navigation menu on not your laptop devices needs some love. Now that it's live we don't really have any choice but to make it better so that's a kind of silver lining. Right?~~
- Search (in the navbar). Aside from there just being too many options you can't fill out

the form and simply hit return. This is *not* a feature. It appears that I am going to have dig in to Bootstrap's Javascript code and wrestle it for control of the enter key as the first press opens the search drop-down menu and the second one closes it. Or we'll just do away with a scoped search box in the navigation menu. If anyone out there has solved this problem though, I'd love to know how you did it.

- Square thumbnails and mouseover events on touch devices. What mouseover events, right? Yeah, that.
- There are still a small set of images that don't have square or black and white thumbnails. Those are in the process of the being generated so it's a problem that will fade away over time (and quickly too, we hope).

Enjoy! <http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/>

This entry was posted in CH 3.0 <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/ch-3-0/> *on November 15, 2013*

[<http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/b-is-for-beta/>] *by asc* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/asc/> .

"C" is for Chromecast: hacking digital signage



http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAS_wmiYTzE

Since the late 1990s museums have been fighting a pointless war against the consumerization of technology. By the time the Playstation 2 was released in 2000, every science museum's exhibition kiosk game looked, felt, and was, terribly out dated. The visitors had better hardware in their lounge rooms than museums could ever hope to have. And ever since the first iPhone hit the shelves in 2007, visitors to museums have also carried far better computing hardware in their pockets.

But what if that consumer hardware, ever dropping in price, could be adapted and quickly integrated into the museum itself?

With this in mind the Labs team took a look at the \$35 [Google Chromecast](http://www.google.com/intl/en/chrome/devices/chromecast/) <http://www.google.com/intl/en/chrome/devices/chromecast/> – a wifi-enabled, HDMI-connected networked media streaming playback system about the size of a USB key.

With new media-rich galleries being built at the museum and power and network ports in a historic building at a premium, We asked ourselves "could a Chromecast be used to deliver the functionality of digital signage system, but at the fraction of the cost"? Could some code be written to serve our needs and possibly those of thousands of small museums around the world as well?



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/chromecast-dongle-pen.jpg>

Before we begin, let's get some terms of reference and vocabulary out of the way. The first four are pretty straightforward:

Display – A TV or a monitor with an HDMI port.

Chromecast device – Sometimes called the “dongle”. The plastic thing that comes in a box and which you plug in to your monitor or display.

Chromecast application – This is a native application that you download from Google and which is used to pair the Chromecast device with your Wifi network.

Chrome and Chromecast extension – The Chrome web browser with the Chromecast extension installed.

That's the most basic setup. Once all of those pieces are configured you can “throw” any web-

page running in Chrome with the Chromecast extension on to the display with the Chromecast device. Here's a picture of Dan Catt's [Flambientcam](https://github.com/revdancatt/CAT436-flambientcam) being thrown on to a small 7-inch display on my desk:



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/chromecast-small-1.jpg>

Okay! The next two terms of reference aren't really that complicated, but their names are more conceptual than specific identifiers:

The "Sender" – This is a webpage that you load in Chrome and which can cause a custom web page/application (often called the "receiver", but more on that below) to be loaded on to one or more the Chromecast device via a shared API.

The "Receiver" – This is also a webpage but more specifically it needs to be a living breathing URL somewhere on the same Internet that is shared by and can be loaded by a Chromecast device. And not just any URL can be loaded either. You need to have the URL in question whitelisted by Google. Once the URL has been approved you will be issued an application ID.

That ID needs to be included in a little bit of Javascript in both the “sender” and the “receiver”.

There are a couple important things to keep in mind:

- First, *the “sender” application has super powers*. It also needs to run on a machine with a running web browser and, more specifically, *that web browser is the one with the super powers since it can send anything to any of the “displays”*. So that pretty much means a dedicated machine that sits quietly in a locked room. The “sender” is just a plain vanilla webpage with some magic Google Javascript but that’s it.
- Second, the “receiver” is a webpage that is being rendered on/by the Chromecast device. When you “throw” a webpage to a Chromecast device (like the picture of Dan’s Flambientcam above) the Chromecast extension is simply beaming the contents of the browser window to the display, by way of the Chromecast device, rather than causing the device to fetch and process data locally.

Since there’s no more way to talk *at* this webpage (the “sender”) because it’s running in a browser window that means we need a bridging server or a... “broker” which will relay communications between the webpage and other applications. You may be wondering “*Wait... talk at the sender*” or “*Wait... other applications?*” or just plain “*...What?*”

Don’t worry about that. It may seem strange and confusing but that’s because we haven’t told you exactly what we’re trying to do yet!

We’re trying to do something like this:



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/chromecast-small-3.jpg>

We're trying to imagine a system where one dedicated machine running Chrome and the Chromecast extension that is configured to send messages and custom URLs for a variety of museum signage purposes to any number of displays throughout the museum. Additionally we want to allow a variety of standalone "clients" in such a way that they can receive information about what is being displayed on a given display and to send updates.

We want the front-of-house staff to be able to update the signage from anywhere in the museum using nothing more complicated than the web browser on their phone and we want the back-of-house staff to be able to create new content (sic) for those displays with nothing more complicated than a webpage.

That means we have a couple more names of things to keep track of:

The Broker – This is a simple socket.io server <http://socket.io> – a simple to use and elegant server that allows you do real-time communications between two or more parties – that both the

“sender” and all the “clients” connect to. It is what allows the two to communicate with each other. It might be running on the same machine as a the Chrome browser or not. The socket.io server needn't even be in the museum itself. Depending on how your network and your network security is configured you could even run this server offsite.

The Client – This is a super simple webpage that contains not much more than some JavaScript code to connect to a “broker” and ask it for the list of available displays and available “screens” (things which can shown on a display) and controls for setting or updating a given display.

In the end you have a model where:

- Some things are definitely in the museum (displays, Chromecast devices, the browser that loads the sender)
- Some things are probably in the museum (the client applications used to update the displays (via the broker and the sender))
- Some things that might be in the museum (the sender and receiver webpages themselves, the broker)

At least that's the idea. We have a working prototype and are still trying to understand where the stress points are in the relationship between all the pieces. It's true that we could just configure the “receiver” to connect to the “broker” and relay messages and screen content that way but then we need to enforce all the logic behind what can and can't be shown, and by whom, in to the receiver itself. Which introduces extra complexity that become problematic to update easily across multiple displays and harder still to debug.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/chromecast-leather-sm.jpg>

We prefer to keep the “sender” and “receiver” as simple as possible. The receiver is little more than an iframe which can load a URL and a footer which can display status messages and other updates. The sender itself is little more than a relay mechanism between the broker and the receiver.

All of the application logic to control the screens lives in the “broker” which is itself a node.js server. Right now the list of stuff (URLs) that can be sent to a display is hard-coded in the server code itself but eventually we will teach it to talk to the API exposed by the content management system that we’ll use to generate museum signage. Hopefully this enforces a nice clean separation of concerns and will make both develop and maintenance easier over time.



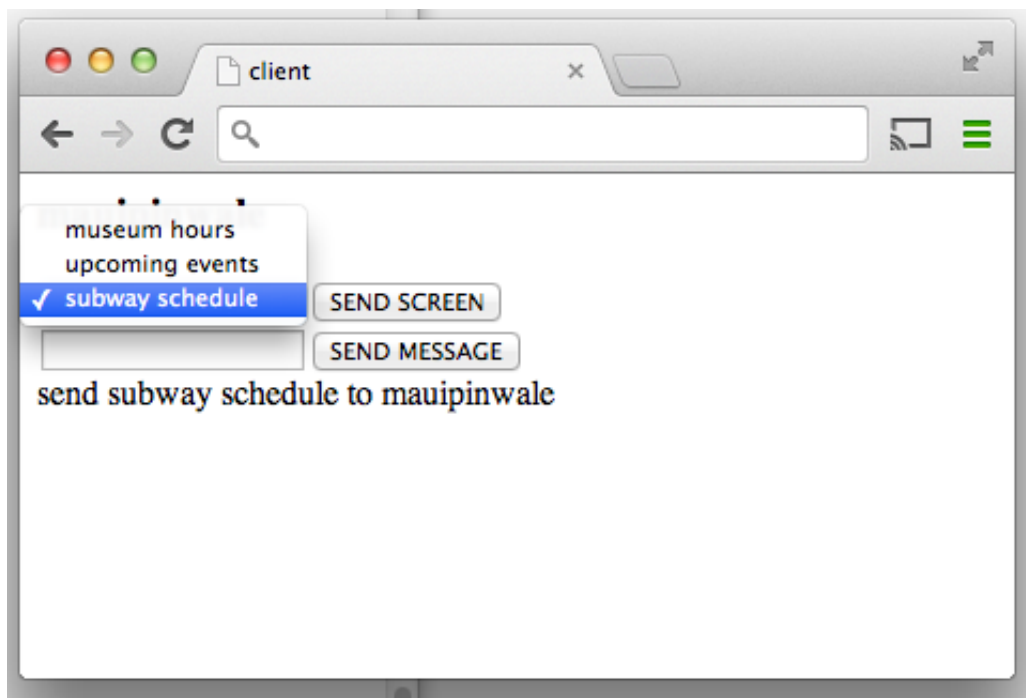
<http://www.aaronland.info/inception-horn/>

We've put [all of this code up on our GitHub account](https://github.com/cooperhewitt/chromecast-signage) <https://github.com/cooperhewitt/chromecast-signage> and we encourage to try and it out and let us know where and when it doesn't work and to contribute your fixes. ~~(For example, careful readers will note the poor formatting of timestamps in some of the screenshots above...)~~ — thanks to hugovk this particular bug [has already been fixed!](https://github.com/cooperhewitt/chromecast-signage/pull/1) <https://github.com/cooperhewitt/chromecast-signage/pull/1> The code is available at:

<https://github.com/cooperhewitt/chromecast-signage> <https://github.com/cooperhewitt/chromecast-signage>

`hewitt/chromecast-signage`

This is a problem that all museums share and so we are hopeful that this can be the first step in developing a lightweight and cost-effective infrastructure to deploy dynamic museum signage.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/chromecast-client.png>

This is what a simple “client” application running on a phone might look like. In this example we’ve just sent a webpage containing the schedule for nearby subway stations to a “device” named Maui Pinwale.

We haven’t built a tool that is ready to use “out of the box” yet. It probably still has some bugs and possibly even some faulty assumptions (in its architecture) but we think it’s an approach that is worth pursuing and so, in closing, it bears repeating that:

We want the front-of-house staff to be able to update the signage from anywhere in the museum using nothing more complicated than the web browser on their phone and we want the back-of-house staff to be able to create new content (sic) for those displays with nothing more complicated than a webpage.

This entry was posted in Experimental <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/experimental/> *on December 9,*

2013 [<http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/c-is-for-chromecast-hacking-digital-signage/>] *by asc* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/au->

[thor/asc/](#).

Rijkscolors! (or colorific promiscuity)

Objects in the shade of

We have **132 objects** that **overlap with this color** and this is **page 2** of 6

The closest color to #fefdc8 is **lemon chiffon** which in robot-speak is **#ffffcd** 



Matchsafe wood. Gift of Stephen W. Brener and Carol B. Brener. **1978-146-73**

This object is part of [Product Design and Decorative Arts](#) collection.



"Lodewijk XIII (1601-43), koning van Frankrijk" **SK-A-278**

This object is part of the [Rijksmuseum](#) collection. It is not part of the Cooper-Hewitt's collection and you're seeing it here because you've enabled the [experimental Rijkscolor](#) feature.



Poster, "Laforet Museum Harajuku", 2000 Off-set lithograph on white wove paper. Gift of Sara and Marc Benda. **2009-12-18**

This object is part of [Drawings, Prints, and Graphic Design](#) collection. There are [2 images](#) of this object.

<http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/experimental/#rijkscolours>

(Rijkscolors are currently disabled as we consider longer-term solutions for cross-institutional browsing and searching. It'll be back soon!)

Rijkscolors are an experimental feature that allow you to browse not only images from the Cooper-Hewitt's collection but also [images from the Rijksmuseum](https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en) <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en> by color!

We see this as *one way* to start to work through the age-old problem of browsing collections across multiple institutions. Not everyone arrives at the Cooper-Hewitt (or the Rijksmuseum)

with an expert knowledge of our curatorial and collecting history and the sheer volume of “stuff” available can be overwhelming. Everyone, at some point, has the “Explore” [problem](http://code.flickr.net/2009/03/03/panda-tuesday-the-history-of-the-panda-new-apis-explore-and-you/) <http://code.flickr.net/2009/03/03/panda-tuesday-the-history-of-the-panda-new-apis-explore-and-you/> : It’s the point where you have so much good stuff to share with people but no good (or many sort-of-bad) avenues for letting people know about it.

Color is an intuitive, comfortable and friendly way to let people warm up to the breadth and depth of our collections. Since adding the ability to [search the collection by color](http://collection.cooperhewitt.net/objects/colors/) <http://collection.cooperhewitt.net/objects/colors/> it’s quickly become the primary way that people browse our collection (more on that below) and as such feels like an excellent tool for browsing *across* collections.



"Kom uit V.O.C.-schip de 'Witte Leeuw"
NG-1978-127-10125-W

This object is part of the [Rijksmuseum](#) collection. It is not part of the Cooper-Hewitt's collection and you're seeing it here because you've enabled the [experimental Rijkscolor feature](#).



Bandbox, "Walking Beam Sidewheeler", ca. 1840 Block-printed paper on pasteboard support. Gift of Mrs. Frederick F. Thompson. 1913-45-8-a,b

This object is part of [Wallcoverings](#) collection.



Figure, "Soldier Seated with Rifle", ca. 1970 Porcelain (bisque). The Henry and Ludmilla Shapiro Collection; Partial gift and partial purchase.... 1989-41-203

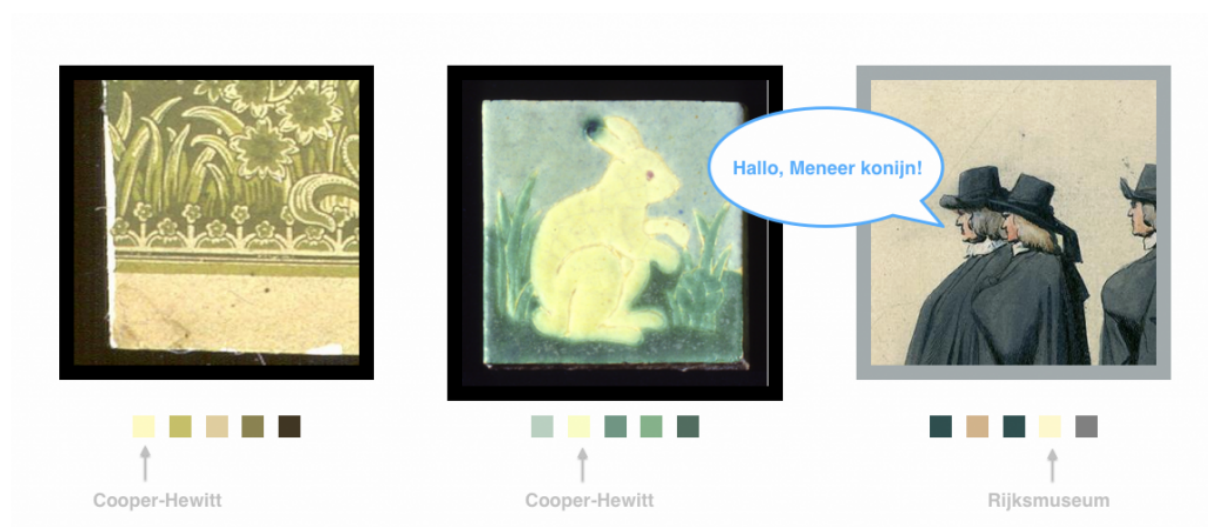
This object was made by Lomonosov Porcelain Factory. This object is part of [Product Design and Decorative Arts](#) collection.

<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/rijkscolours-4.png>

Over time, we hope to add this functionality for many other cultural heritage institutions but chose to start with the Rijksmuseum because we share an historical focus in our early collecting practices *and* because they were nice (read: [AWESOME](http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/images/cooperspank_tumblr.gif) http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/images/cooperspank_tumblr.gif) enough to make all their collection images available under [a liberal Creative Commons license](https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/api/terms-and-conditions-of-use) <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/api/terms-and-conditions-of-use>.

We then indexed all those images using the same tools we use to [extract colors](http://labs.coop-) <http://labs.coop->

erhewitt.org/2013/giv-do/ and [measure busy-ness or “entropy”](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/default-sort-or-what-would-shannon-do/) <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/default-sort-or-what-would-shannon-do/> from our own collection and combined the two lists. Images from the Rijksmuseum have a different colored border to indicate that they are not part of our collection. Images from the Rijksmuseum link directly to the page for that object on [the Rijksmuseum website](https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en) <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en> itself.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee3lcybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/rijkscolours-bunny-crop.png>

As with the [concordances for people](http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/first/) <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/first/> we just want to hold hands (for now — *Seb tells me this means we might want to move to second base* <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/02/09/1076175089032.html> in the future) with other museums and are happy to send visitors their way. After all, that’s what the Internet is for!

Rijkscolors is an experimental feature so you’ll need to enable it on a per-browser basis by visiting the [experimental features](http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/experimental/) <http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/experimental/> section of the collection website, here:

<http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/experimental/#rijkscolors> <http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/experimental/#rijkscolors>

But wait, there’s more.

We’ve also made public all the code used to harvest metadata and images from the Rijksmuseum as well as the resultant data dumps mapping colors and entropy scores to Rijksmuseum

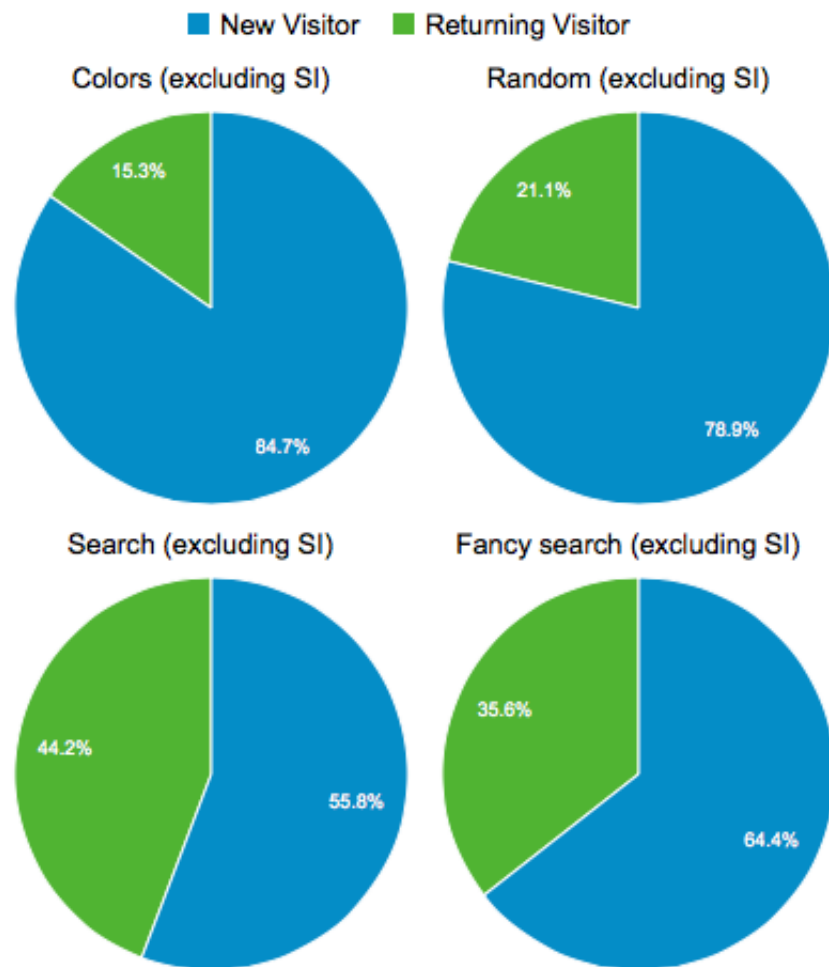
um accession numbers with internal Cooper-Hewitt [object IDs](http://www.brooklynintegers.com/) <http://www.brooklynintegers.com/> . We created a custom mapping because we use Solr to do color search on the website and that requires a numeric ID as the primary key for an object.

Then we imported all the objects from the Rijksmuseum, along with their color values and other metrics, in to our Solr index giving them a magic [department ID](http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/departments/) <http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/departments/> (aka 51949951 or the Rijksmuseum) and making them private by default. If you've enabled Riskscolors when we search for objects by color instead of only asking for things with a given color that are public we ask for things that are public *OR* part of department number 51949951. Simple!

The code and the data dumps are provided as-is, more of a reference implementation and a toolbox than anything you might use without modifications. We've put it all on GitHub and we welcome your suggestions and fixes:

<https://github.com/cooperhewitt/rijksmuseum-collection/> <https://github.com/cooperhewitt/rijksmuseum-collection/>

We mentioned search vs browse so let's take a peek at the last 30 days (Nov 11 to Dec 10, 2013) of visitor behaviour on the collection site.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/last30-days-nov-dec-2013-new-vs-returning.png>

Or put another way:

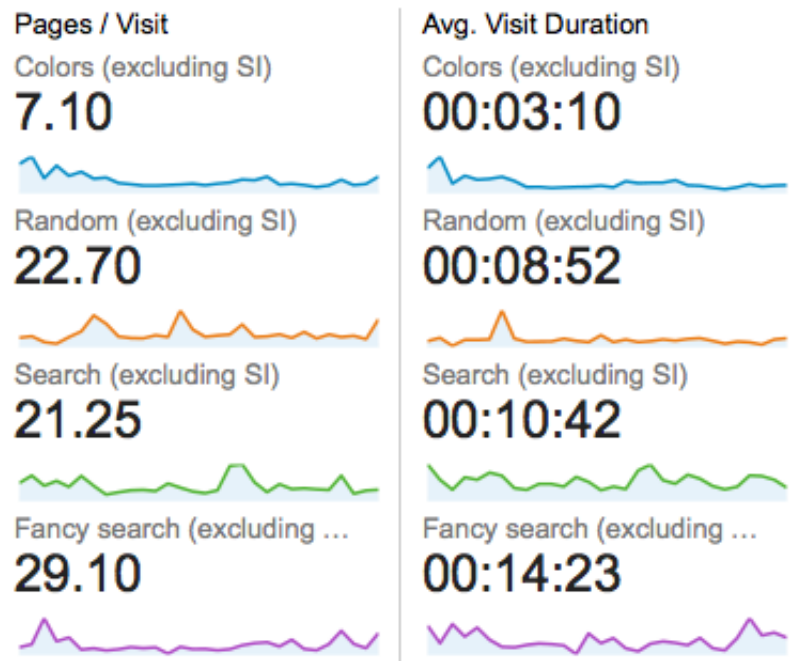
- 48.89% of visits used color navigation (anywhere – not just color palette page)
- 4.39% of visits used normal search
- 2.24% of visits used random button
- 1.25% of visits used fancy search

The figures for color navigation are artificially inflated by the press the feature got in

[Slate](http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_eye/2013/11/19/smithsonian_cooper_hewitt_s_new_beta_website Lets_you_browse_the_online.html) http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_eye/2013/11/19/smithsonian_cooper_hewitt_s_new_beta_website Lets_you_browse_the_online.html,

[The Verge](http://www.theverge.com/2013/11/21/5129062/browse-the-smithsonian-cooper-hewitt-museum-with-colors) <http://www.theverge.com/2013/11/21/5129062/browse-the-smithsonian-cooper-hewitt-museum-with-colors> and else-

where (the comments are amusing), but even removing that spike, color navigation is at least *twice as used as search* in the time period. We'll report back on some new data once December and January are done.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/last30-days-nov-dec-2013-tos-ppv.png>

Not unsurprisingly, visitors who use search spend a lot more time on the site and look at many more pages. They are also far more likely to be returning visitors. For newbies, though, color and random navigation methods are far more popular – and still result in healthy browsing depths.

In related news [Nate Solas](http://natesolas.com/) sent us a patch for the [palette-server](https://github.com/cooperhewitt/palette-server/), the tool we use to extract colors from our collection imagery. He said:

“...this improves the color detection by making it a bit more human. It goes two ways: 1) boost all color “areas” by saturation, as if saturated colors take up more room in the image. 2) add a “magic” color if a few conditions are met: not already included, more than 2x the average image saturation, and above the minimum area for inclusion.”

palette-server debug



It picks up my pet peeve: <http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18564781/>, does good work on <http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18476589/>, and IMO (without magic) improves <http://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18471835/>. The vast majority are unchanged but there are a few subtle boosts regarding saturation that I think make things jive a little closer with how people see images.

<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/palette-server-nate.png>

We've now [merged Nate's changes](https://github.com/cooperhewitt/palette-server/pull/2) <https://github.com/cooperhewitt/palette-server/pull/2> in to our code base (technically it's actually a change to Giv's [RoyGBiv](https://github.com/givp/RoyGBiv) <https://github.com/givp/RoyGBiv> code) and they will be applied the next time we run the color-extraction tools on our collection (and the Rijksmuseum's collection). Thanks, Nate!

As with all the experimental features they are ... well, experimental. They are a little rough around the edges and we may not have found (or even noticed) any outstanding problems or bugs. We hope that [you'll let us know](https://twitter.com/cooperhewittlab/) <https://twitter.com/cooperhewittlab/> if you find any and otherwise enjoy following along as we figure out where we're going, even if we're not always sure how we get there.



<http://3ug4ii3uortgp68ee31cybxjyz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Screen-Shot-2013-12-11-at-12.23.23-PM.png>

This entry was posted in CH 3.0 <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/category/ch-3-0/> on December 11, 2013

[<http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2013/rijkscolors-or-colorific-promiscuity/>] by *asc* <http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/author/asc/>.